

CONGREGATIONAL APPROACHES FOR CHRISTIAN CLERGY AND CHURCH  
LEADERS TO EDUCATE, LIMIT, AND ELIMINATE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WITHIN A  
CHRISTIAN CHURCH CONTEXT

A THESIS-PROJECT  
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To my supportive husband, family, church family and friends for encouraging and praying for me during this journey. Thank you and to God be the glory.

This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Psalm 118:24, NKJV.

—Sandra Kay James' favorite Scripture

## CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS .....	vi
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ABSTRACT.....	vii
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### Chapter

1. THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING.....	1
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS .....	27
3. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	50
4. PROJECT DESIGN .....	74
5. OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS .....	89

### Appendix

A. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE KNOWLEDGE PRE-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE..	95
B. PRE-SURVEY RESULTS.....	99
C. EIGHT BIBLE STUDY OUTLINES .....	128
D. FOUR SERMON TOPIC SUGGESTIONS .....	144
E. SIX SERMON MANUSCRIPTS .....	145
F. SIX LITANIES FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.....	171
G. POST-SURVEY FOR FUTURE USE.....	179

BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	183
--------------------	-----

VITA .....	191
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## ILLUSTRATIONS

### Figure

1. A Model of Love.....	19
2. A Path to Spiritual Growth .....	21

### Table

1. Q1: Participant Gender .....	80
2. Q2: Participant Age.....	80
3. Q3: Participant Ministry Title.....	81
4. Q8: “I Have addressed DV within my church” .....	81
5. Q13: “The leaders and ministerial staff of my church have received training on how to appropriately handle domestic violence issues.” .....	82
6. Q16: “I know what resources are available to provide training to pastoral care staff...supporting and referring DV victims” .....	82
7. Q24: “I need training on how to preach and teach on issues of domestic violence.”.....	83
8. Q25: “I need training in pastoral care and counseling concerning domestic violence.”.....	83
9. Q26: “If offered, I would attend domestic violence training.” .....	84

## ABSTRACT

This thesis-project's focus is to examine and offer workable solutions to domestic violence issues facing clergy, church leaders and congregants. The focus is limited to churches located in Prince William County, Virginia. This thesis-project examines Scripture, a review of relevant literature, and statistical information from research institutions. Finally, this thesis-project will recommend effective holistic pastoral care responses in teaching and preaching models that promote physical, emotional, and spiritual healing and wellness for victims of domestic violence.

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

### Introduction

According to thehotline.org, domestic violence is defined as,

Domestic violence (also called intimate partner violence (IPV), domestic abuse or relationship abuse) is a pattern of behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship.<sup>1</sup>

In order to adequately address the problem and its setting in this thesis-project, in addition to the definition by thehotline.org, I have expanded the definition to include spiritual abuse. I define spiritual abuse as: the misappropriation of authority and use of scripture by spiritual leaders who inflict harm on victims thereby causing greater damage to those seeking spiritual guidance. In a nutshell, spiritual abusers include pastors and church leaders who violate the trust placed in them as pastoral caregivers by parishioners and as a result of their actions they themselves become abusers. As such, domestic violence knows no race, religion, age, sexual orientation, or gender.

The effects of domestic violence may have generational consequences on families. Childwelfare.gov reported that frequent exposure to domestic violence not only predisposes a child to psychological, social, and physical problems, but also teaches them that violence is a normal way of life.<sup>2</sup>

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1. National Domestic Violence Hotline, "What is Domestic Violence?", <https://www.thehotline.org/is-this-abuse/abuse-defined>, accessed November 23, 2019.

2. Children's Bureau, "Domestic Violence and the Child Welfare System," <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/domestic-violence.pdf>, October 2014, accessed November 23, 2019.



## Personal Reflection

The problems associated with domestic violence, and a primary inspiration for this thesis-project, are up close and personal for me. As a child growing up in small-town Alabama, my family was victimized by domestic violence. My father was the abuser, my mother was the immediate abused individual, and my entire family suffered collateral damage as a result. I believe when children are consistently exposed to acts of domestic violence, be it by parents, relatives, video games, and televised programming, and unless they are taught differently, such patterns of behavior become the norm or *ab-norm* leading to a lifestyle of modeling that which has been seen and learned. Scripture says in Proverbs “train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”<sup>3</sup> Parental responsibility and training of children within the home must not be taken lightly. Parents should not allow society, fashions, fads, social media, friends, nor other family members to serve as trainers of their children, and afterwards blame those sources as causes for negative outcomes.

In retrospect, my father was a U.S. Army veteran, in the segregated Army, who served during World War II in the Chemical Corp. Additionally, he was an alcoholic, who incidentally was also the victim of an accidental self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head, which left him in a coma for nine months. This accident occurred during one of his drunken episodes. Although he survived the gunshot wound and went on to live a relatively healthy, productive life, he suffered what I now know to be Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) which went unaddressed during his lifetime. His injuries left him an epileptic which also caused him to suffer from grand mal seizures. I now believe my father used alcohol as a means of self-medicating pain and other symptoms resulting from his injuries. My family and I knew

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3. Proverbs 22:6-7. All scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

that on any given payday, and after hours of heavy alcohol consumption by my father, domestic violence would take place.

Although I was very young, vivid flashbacks of incidences of violence against my mother are as fresh now as though it were yesterday. Most days my father was a good family man and neighbor when he was sober. To my knowledge, incidences of his drunken rages of violence against his family went unchecked. My family had a good reputation within the community. Although local law enforcement officials were aware of my father's drinking and recurring drunken and disorderly outbursts, often they would come to the house and simply say "C, go on in the house and sleep it off before we have to take you in [to jail]." I remember nights of having to run out of the house with my brothers and sister to the neighbor's home for safety. Eventually we learned just to keep silent and hope for better times, until the day came when my brothers were too old to let our father continue his drunken rages without consequences. Therefore, for the safety of her children, one day after my father had left home for work, my mother packed us all in the car and left my father, never to return.

This was a very difficult time for me, because I was a daddy's girl and believed my daddy could do no wrong. Eventually, time and his abusive behavior changed my belief. Because my mother was a God-fearing, church-going woman she never divorced my father, although they never reconciled. They went to their graves as estranged husband and wife! Through all of this, our pastor and church leaders were aware of the domestic violence because my dad's drunken outbursts were so very loud, public, and disorderly. Yet, through it all, the church of my childhood either intentionally kept silent or they did not know how, or have the training or resources, to confront the issue of domestic violence.

## The Problem

Fast forwarding to today, my current ministry context in a megachurch is vastly different from the small-town church of my childhood. Nevertheless, I have observed the very same kind of responses to domestic violence: down-playing, minimizing, and even ignoring the fact that domestic violence happens in society and especially in the church. Moreover, domestic violence is prevalent in the church and society. I remember the shock and gasps when it was revealed in the news that renowned televangelist Juanita Bynum, well known for her inspiring messages and music aimed at empowering women, was a victim of domestic violence at the hands of her well known husband Bishop Thomas W. Weeks III, senior *pastor of* Global Destiny Church; when Ray Rice of the Baltimore Ravens was suspended and eventually released from his team in 2014 for punching his now wife Janay in an Atlantic City elevator; or former Kansas City Chiefs running back, Kareem Hunt, in the aftermath of TMZ releasing video showing Hunt shoving and kicking a woman during an altercation at a Cleveland hotel; the Washington Redskins hiring Reuben Foster after the San Francisco 49ers released the linebacker following a domestic violence arrest; in the world of entertainment, when singer Chris Brown was charged with felony assault to his then girlfriend Rhianna.<sup>4</sup> These are just a few yet very public incidences of domestic violence in our society.

In October there is a big observance for breast cancer awareness, pink ribbons are passed out and members are encouraged to wear them proudly. Pink is worn by the congregants, the

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4. "Junita Bynum Assaulted by Husband," *Essence.com*, December 16, 2009, accessed November 14, 2019, <https://www.essence.com/news/juanita-bynum-assaulted-by-husband>; Ian Rapoport, "Ray Rice Speaks on Kareem Hunt, reflects on own actions," *NFL.com*, December 2, 2018, accessed November 14, 2019, <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000994218/article/ray-rice-speaks-on-kareem-hunt-reflects-on-own-actions>; Associated Press, "Redskins claim Reuben Foster despite domestic violence arrest," *New York Post*, November 27, 2018, accessed November 14, 2019, <https://nypost.com/2018/11/27/redskins-claim-reuben-foster-despite-domestic-violence-arrest>; "Chris Brown Charged with Assault on Rihanna," *Billboard*, March 5, 2009, accessed November 14, 2019, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/269279/chris-brown-charged-with-assault-on-rihanna>.

choirs, ministry participants and survivors are celebrated. Yet, domestic violence awareness is in the same month and it is not mentioned. Once again, the church is uninvolved or altogether silent. There are no displays, no literature or resources on domestic violence assistance. Why is this? Could it be that if we, the church, do not acknowledge the issue we are absolved of responsibility as our brother or sister's keeper concerning domestic violence?

### **Hypothesis**

In most cases when it comes to the abused and marginalized who suffer at the hands of domestic violence abusers the church is silent and keeps silent while looking the other way. I know this because I have experienced it, observed it and it is still happening in houses of worship today. Why is the voice of the church silent when domestic violence intrudes, destroys and in some cases kills our worshippers and those in the communities we serve? Could it be that pastors, clergy and church leaders are ill equipped with the proper resources, language and knowledge to appropriately enter the conversations? In casual conversation with clergy and church leaders some of the reasons given were not wanting to interfere in family business, to risky, lack of knowledge, and other ministry priorities and concerns.

While under-utilized or not utilized at all, the church has rich resources of Scripture and Christian traditions to lovingly and effectively address issues of domestic violence to both abused and abuser. Oftentimes, however, church leaders misuse Scripture, in some cases empowering the abuser and victimizing the abused even more. For example, "In the world you will have tribulation."<sup>5</sup> Also Romans 5:3-4 says "tribulation produces perseverance".<sup>6</sup> Ephesians

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5. John 16:33.

6. Romans 5:3-4.

5:22 says: “Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord.”<sup>7</sup> In misusing these, and similar Scriptures, to excuse and ignore domestic violence, it seems that there are more concerns for rehabilitating and redeeming perpetrators than caring and restoring the victim. This kind of response both trivializes domestic violence and Scripture.

When the church has not been able or willing to offer viable solutions to victims of domestic violence, the consequence is the perpetuation of functional-dysfunctional family units. I define a functional-dysfunctional family as a family that functionally appears fine, happy and well put together in public, but behind closed doors family members are tormented by dysfunctional, abusive, and sometimes deadly behavior.

By no means am I suggesting that spiritual guidance using scripture is unwarranted. In fact, there are frequent occasions when pastors, spiritual caregivers, and church leaders must refer members for pastoral care and counseling. The vocation and training of such individuals will invariably involve the faithful and effective application of Scripture to the situation, but not everyone has access to such trained professions or inclination to seek their services. Thus, my prayer is that by doing this thesis-project, it will assist me, and other church leaders, to become aware and acknowledge the existence of domestic violence issues and become uncomfortable with complacency when confronting it in the church.

### **The “Holy Hush” in the African American Church**

When I think of the “holy hush”, it is a time of quiet reflection during the early morning hours when the house is still as I sit with my first cup of coffee during my morning devotion and prayer. Or that snow-covered morning just at the break of dawn when everything is still and the

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7. Ephesians 5:22.

first glimmers of sunlight begins to break the darkness of the former night, it is in those moments I appreciate the “blessed quietness”, the “be still and know that I am God” moments, before the hustle and bustle of the day begins. But during my research for this thesis-project on domestic violence in the church, I have come to the realization that there is another “holy hush” concerning domestic violence in the church that is not comforting but disturbing and painful to all who suffer because of the silence.

“A so-called “holy hush” by religious leaders when it comes to dealing with domestic violence is putting the safety of community members at risk, says Professor Nancy Nason-Clark who has studied domestic violence for more than 25 years.”<sup>8</sup> The church should be a place where people go for healing, restoration and be allowed to give voice to their joy and pain. But, in the case of domestic violence, victims are not being heard because church leaders are not actively listening. I believe the “hearing impairment” for leaders concerning domestic violence is a “disability” caused by a lack of training and education on how to properly handle issues surrounding domestic violence. In some cases there is a disconnect between the church and the local organization that are there to provide support to the church, victims and the abuser. Thereby, making it difficult to identify and support members of congregations and communities that are victims of domestic violence.

In the African American church experience, the context of the “holy hush” could possibly be linked to their history and the use of scripture to justify ownership of people as property, inflict violence and harm, promote blind obedience and maintain ruthless control over slaves during the slave era. There is a poignant example of this warped thinking and abuse of scripture

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8. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/some-church-leaders-fail-to-deal-with-domestic-violence-says-prof-1.3109014>, (accessed, February 25, 2020).

in the November 1, 2019 movie release *Harriett*.<sup>9</sup> In the opening scene there is a black preacher, Rev. Green, welding a bible in his hand, standing on the porch with the white slave owners/masters, preaching to the slaves and quoting Ephesians 6:5, “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.”

The African American church’s experience of violence and control supported by scripture might have in some ways shaped the church’s approach to domestic violence. The “holy hush” could be a transference of years of generational acceptance of the use of scripture to keep a person in bondage, making it less likely to find support and help in the church.

Censored versions of the Bible were given to enslaved Africans in British colonies in the 19th century as a way to convert them to the Christian faith.

Anthony Schmidt, senior curator of Bible and Religion in America at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., says the first instance of this abridged version titled, *Parts of the Holy Bible, selected for the use of the Negro Slaves, in the British West-India Islands*, was published in 1807. "About 90 percent of the Old Testament is missing [and] 50 percent of the New Testament is missing," Schmidt says. "Put in another way, there are 1,189 chapters in a standard protestant Bible. This Bible contains only 232."

Schmidt says passages that could have prompted rebellion were removed, for example: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28 And verses that reinforced the institution of slavery, including "the most famous pro-slavery verse that many pro-slavery people would have cited," says Schmidt, were kept. "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ." Ephesians 6:5.<sup>10</sup>

The Rev. Jesse Jackson wrote an article in the *Defender* newspaper on the Slave Bible, reflecting on the role of faith today analyzes the ramifications of the text’s existence,

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9. *Harriett*, directed by Kasi Lemmons, featuring (Cynthia Erivo & Leslie Odom Jr.) Perfect World Pictures, 2019), D-Cinema (Focus Features, 2019).

10 . <https://www.npr.org/2018/12/09/674995075/slave-bible-from-the-1800s-omitted-key-passages-that-could-incite-rebellion>, (Accessed February 25, 2020).

Imagine where America would be if Harriet Tubman, the legendary heroine of the Underground Railroad, was unable to quote the mighty Book of Exodus and tell Southern slaves that it was God's will that they – like the ancient Israelites – should flee bondage and reach the Promised Land of freedom in the North.

Imagine how much longer the bitter walls of segregation would have remained standing if Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights preachers were unable to shame powerful Southern judges, sheriffs, governors and newspaper editors by quoting Moses straight from the Bible, "Thus sayeth the Lord – Let my people go."

Fortunately, honest missionaries brought the full Gospel to slaves in the Americas, who drank long and deeply from the wellspring of liberation in the true Bible. But the debate over whether the Bible promotes freedom or restricts it continues to this day.<sup>11</sup>

We see the results of what happens when the sacred text of the Holy Bible is interpreted properly and applied responsibly it is a source of wholeness and liberation for those who need to be set free from whatever is keeping them in bondage. For victims of domestic violence, supported by the church, this same sacred text, gives power to the weak, hope to the hopeless and courage to the fearful. Letting all who will give voice to the silence of the "holy hush", especially in the church, hear and know... "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."<sup>12</sup>

### **The Setting**

Additional inspiration for this thesis-project is directly connected to my current role in full-time ministry as the assistant pastor of a megachurch where the congregation is predominately African American, upper middle to middle-class, with approximately 5,000 active members residing in the suburbs of southern Maryland, Northern Virginia, and Washington, D.C. My role includes teaching, preaching, pastoral care, and counseling.

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11. <https://defendernetwork.com/news/national/oped-the-slave-bible-provokes-us-to-consider-the-role-of-faith-in-our-world-today/>, (Accessed February 26, 2020).

12. John 8:36, NIV.



Closer to home as I currently live in the Washington DC Metropolitan Area commonly referred to as the DMV – (District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia). Statistics gathered by the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCSDV) for the metropolitan area are staggering. NCSDV defines domestic violence as, “. . . the willful intimidation, physical assault, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetuated by one intimate partner against another. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, threats, and emotional abuse. The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary dramatically.”<sup>13</sup> Statistics for the DMV include the following:

#### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN WASHINGTON, DC

- 32,794 domestic violence-related calls were made to the Metropolitan Police Department in 2013, approximately 1 call every 16 minutes. This figure represents an increase of nearly 1,000 total calls, or 2 additional domestic-violence related calls per day, as compared to 2012.
- 5,005 petitions for Civil Protection Orders were filed in 2013, a 7% increase in filings from 2012. This is a number that has been consistently trending up in recent years, with the number of total filings in 2012 also being a 7% increase over 2011.
- 5,873 people were served at the two Domestic Violence Intake Center (DVIC) locations in 2013, a 7% overall increase from 2012. The DC Superior Court location served 3,451 persons, and the DVIC satellite office in Southeast Washington (DVIC-SE) served 2,422. While the number served at the Courthouse remained relatively flat, the DVIC-SE located at United Medical Center located in Ward 8 served over 400 more persons in 2013 than 2012, an increase of 20%.
- 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men have experienced some form of physical violence by an intimate partner.
- On a typical day, domestic violence hotlines receive approximately 21,000 calls, approximately 15 calls every minute.
- Intimate partner violence accounts for 15% of all violent crime victims.
- Having a gun in the home increases the risk of homicide by at least 500%.

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13. DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence. *Domestic violence in the District of Columbia: 2013 Statistical snapshot*. Retrieved from <http://dccadv.org/img/fck/file/2013%20statistics%20One%20page/pdf>. 2015, (accessed November 23, 2019).

- 72% of all murder-suicides involved an intimate partner; 94% of the victims of these crimes are female.

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN MARYLAND

There were 46 domestic violence-related deaths in Maryland from (July 2016-June 2017). MNADV tracks domestic violence-related deaths in Maryland and releases the statistics in February of each year.

In one day, 956 victims of domestic violence were served in Maryland. On September 14, 2016, 22 domestic violence programs in Maryland participated in the National Census of Domestic Violence Services. On that day, 956 victims were served, 407 found refuge in emergency shelters or transitional housing provided by the local domestic violence programs, and 549 adults and children received non-residential assistance and services, including counseling, legal advocacy, and children's support groups.

There were 1,784 Temporary Protective Orders and 1,308 Final Protective Orders granted (Fiscal Year 2016) The Maryland Judiciary periodically publishes information about protective orders issued in Maryland.

There were 15,301 Domestic Violence-Related Crimes in Maryland last year (Fiscal Year 2015). The latest domestic violence statistics reported by the Maryland State Police is Crime in Maryland; 2015 Uniform Crime Report (UCR).

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN VIRGINIA

- In 2012, 17,664 domestic violence crimes were reported to Virginia law enforcement. Many others went unreported.
- In 2012, Virginia law enforcement made 20,718 arrests for domestic violence. Only 26% of these arrests led to convictions. Of the 1,016 felony charges, 90% led to convictions.
- Virginia police estimate there are approximately 31,000 active protective orders on file in the state at any given time.
- In 2012, 117 Virginians were killed in domestic violence-related homicides, comprising 34% of all Virginia homicides deaths (117 of 344). A majority were killed with firearms
- 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men have experienced some form of physical violence by an intimate partner.vi
- On a typical day, domestic violence hotlines receive approximately 21,000 calls, approximately 15 calls every minute.

- Intimate partner violence accounts for 15% of all violent crime.
- Having a gun in the home increases the risk of homicide by at least 500%.
- 72% of all murder-suicides involved an intimate partner; 94% of the victims of these crimes are female.

I attended a luncheon with candidates running for public office in our county and the candidate running for the district attorney's office seat stated that the number one cause of homicides in our county was domestic violence. That was a surreal moment as I reflected on the area of study for my thesis-project. There have been several high-profile deaths due to domestic violence in our community within weeks of each other, but they were not mentioned in the house of worship. When it is time to speak on the issue of domestic violence in the church, the church seems to be silent. In our ministerial association meeting, ministry leaders, pastors, and clergy talked about the tragedy in the loss of a police officer in the line of duty answering a domestic violence call, but not much if anything was mentioned about the families affected, the abuse they suffered, and the tragedy of their loss due to domestic violence.

I am constantly contacted by congregants and non-members from the surrounding communities, as well as pastors from other states who request my help with members who have relocated in proximity to my church. Just within the past twelve months there have been several cases of domestic violence committed by both men and women, some ending in death, who live within a five-to ten-mile radius of our church. I am also motivated by what I see as I watch news media outlets, local and across the nation, reporting numerous high-profile domestic violence cases involving professional sports athletes, entertainers, corporate executives, and the tragic incidences of parents murdering each other leaving children traumatized and orphaned, or in some cases murdering the entire family. What a tragedy!

Due to my personal experiences, I am passionate and believe the church can and must do better concerning domestic violence. I am compelled to speak out in this thesis-project and commit to utilizing the platform God has given me as an assistant pastor to confront the issue of domestic violence within my congregation and the community at large. My goal is to adequately educate and prepare myself and others to produce and implement strategies for church clergy and leaders to be effective, compassionate, pastoral caregivers in the area of domestic violence, and trust God for a positive outcome.

In this thesis-project, I will address views of domestic violence committed by men and women and how society views them. Additionally, I will discuss the extent to which church leaders seem unwilling or unable to confront domestic violence within the church. I will also discuss leaders' attitudes or beliefs concerning domestic violence within the church, and ethical issues facing abusers and the abused, and the dilemmas which may result in seeking resolution in situations of domestic violence.

My ministry experience has informed a conclusion that too often church leaders publicly downplay and/or ignore instances and issues related to domestic violence. Almost daily there are very public reports of domestic violence, and undoubtedly countless unreported private incidences of domestic violence in homes where it is kept silent, throughout our nation. Maybe some of the issues have to do with how I and others, especially in African American families, were raised under the house rule "what goes on in the house stays in the house"! Therefore, we do not dare talk about the elephant in the room!

A primary question guiding this research is, why is the issue of domestic violence, which in some instances may result in deadly consequences, not addressed in worship settings and Bible studies? Could it be that pastors/leaders are not prepared to address the issue of domestic

violence from a biblical perspective due to a lack of training and education? Or could it be an issue of comfortability in having the conversation?

Over the years, I have noticed, based on my experiences in ministry as a lay person and as clergy within the Christian community, that even in situations where domestic violence cases are very public, attracting the attention of the media due to the tragic nature of the offense or a death occurs, there continues to be little or no mention of the incidents within the churches. The time for a healthy discussion is way overdue. Conversations and suggestions made by clergy and church leaders must contain biblical advice along with sound next steps. The ability to put theory into practice must not overlook privileged and confidential information which has legal consequences and ethical implications.

My thesis-project addresses this issue by reviewing appropriate scholarly writings and offering resources to assist churches in 1) Bringing awareness to the problem; and 2) Identifying appropriate Christian responses. This thesis-project is not designed to conduct assessments and report on the psychological or theoretical consequences of domestic violence, but rather to assist the congregation I now serve and other congregations in responding appropriately to this form of human suffering.

Information has been gathered through surveys and interviews with clergy who are a part of the pastoral care team at the church where I currently serve and from other clergy in the local area. This thesis-project intends to show a relationship between domestic violence awareness and education and one's ability to operate effectively as a pastoral care team. Additionally, its design is to instill in Christian clergy and leaders a level of confidence which culminates in a healthy Christian response to the problem of domestic violence. As a result of gathering information, I will create resources which will include theme-specific sermons, litanies, Bible study outlines,

and a survey instrument for use especially during the month of October which is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

In our efforts to do what is good and what is right, Scripture declares, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”<sup>14</sup> I believe that in cases of domestic violence our religious leaders are challenged, oftentimes beyond that which one may be willing to admit, in one-on-one sessions with parishioners to express God’s love in such a way that it transcends the presenting problem. This is not to say that my colleagues are incompetent—quite the contrary—but what I am saying is when pastors and church leaders use scriptures out of context and do not know how to demonstrate God’s love and power in their actions or explanations then how can she or he explain to others how to do so? In my opinion, one of the pathogens plaguing pastoral care and counseling is wealth of knowledge which lacks practical execution. Although the biblical context has a somewhat different meaning, a scriptural reference which speaks to the position is when the Apostle Paul stood before Festus who said “Paul, you are insane. Too much study has made you crazy.”<sup>15</sup>

Political correctness has affected the fervency of far too many religious leaders, and many will only address domestic violence to a certain extent, if at all. This is not true in all cases, but it occurs in too many cases. Religious leaders face challenging ethical dilemmas due to the lure of *the things of this world*, namely money, fame, popularity, friendships, and attendance. This author believes religious leaders are making conscious decisions to remain silent, restraining their consciences and intentionally crafting “their truth” in what is said or done in their pulpits throughout the week and especially on Sunday morning in such a way as to satisfy

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14. Matthew 5:48.

15. Acts 26:24, NIV.

status quo. This writer believes it is time to interrupt the violence cycle, and the silencing of issues associated with it. At this point I must refer to Nancy Nason-Clark and her “Top Ten checklist” and I quote number 10; “Do you hold violent, controlling men [and women] accountable for their actions?”<sup>16</sup> My personal addition to that statement is, are religious leaders afraid to hold violent, controlling men and women accountable because they are primarily afraid of losing tithes, offerings, popularity, and members?

In reference to the African tradition, Yosufu Turaki in the Foreword to Samuel Waje Kunhiyop’s book entitled *African Christian Ethics*, says,

Moral maxims for Christians are rooted neither in African traditional ethics nor in Western traditional ethics, but in Holy Scriptures. We have a duty to obey God based upon his Revelation. Men and women seek to obey God through a proper reading and interpretation of scripture. Scripture properly read and interpreted is normative – binding on all people at all times and in every place. Ethics is not what the Christian seeks to do for his or her own purpose. A Christian must seek to do what pleases God.<sup>17</sup>

A healthy referral process does not negate the effectiveness of pastors and pastoral care ministry teams but rather enhances the totality of care. Clergy must not be guilty of suggesting that one is to “obey those who rule over you and be submissive.”<sup>18</sup> This scripture, if taken at face value by vulnerable congregants, can produce devastating negative results. Church pastors and other congregational leaders must relinquish the mindset that “we” have all the answers or the expectation that we *should* have all the answers. Someone once said to me, “You don’t have to

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16. Rachel Boehm, “Shattering the Silence of Abuse,” CRCNA Network, last updated February 27, 2014, <https://network.crcna.org/safe-church/shattering-silence-abuse> (accessed November 23, 2019)

17. Yusufu Turaki, “Foreword,” in Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), accessed November 18, 2019, <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=RVi7SEfnVwQC&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&dq=christian+ethics+and+domestic+violence&ots=rJb90iR9Mf&sig=i5XY6xgYvolY7RacIm8MtWjlsME#v=onepage&q=christian%20ethics%20and%20domestic%20violence&f=false>, vi.

18. Hebrews 13:17.

have all the answers but at least know who or where to go and find them.” Ultimately, and like a skilled physician, our goal as pastoral caregivers should always be to do no harm.

Referring again to Nancy Nason-Clark’s suggested “Top ten checklist” for deciding if congregational leaders are serious about the issue of abuse, the first of the top ten listed is, “Do you offer a listening ear?” She further suggests, “too often when providing guidance to congregants, the primary element which makes a difference is that religious leaders have ears bigger than their mouths.”<sup>19</sup> I wholeheartedly agree with her position because too often religious leaders feel as if we must always give the *right* answer, in that moment.

Additionally, to drive home the importance of intentional listening I provide the following excerpt by Dietrich Bonhoeffer from his book entitled *Life Together*,

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God’s love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. So, it is His work that we do for our brother when we learn to listen to him. Christians, especially ministers, so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they must render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking. Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking where they should be listening. But he who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God either; he will be doing nothing but prattle in the presence of God too. This is the beginning of the death of the spiritual life, and in the end, there is nothing left but spiritual chatter and clerical condescension arrayed in pious words. One who cannot listen long and patiently will presently be talking beside the point and be never really speaking to others, albeit he be not conscious of it. Anyone who thinks that his time is too valuable to spend keeping quiet will eventually have no time for God and his brother, but only for himself and for his own follies.<sup>20</sup>

When considering an acceptable response to domestic violence one must not only focus on the immediate presenting problem, but also not overlook the entire family life. Nason-Clark states

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19. Boehm, “Shattering the Silence of Abuse.”

20. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (New York: Harper Collins, 1954), 97.



the following in her book *The Battered Wife*, “Women become the emotional thermostats inside of homes (or its heart) as men wage war with the forces of evil outside.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, unwise or uninformed biblical pastoral counseling may instruct a spouse or significant other to stay in an abusive relationship when all signals and red flags say leave the relationship for the health and welfare of all concerned.

Education is critical in bringing about deliverance and change. Sermons where the primary focus lies in the notion of “name it and claim it” or just “hold on until God works it out” without accountability to God’s Word has the propensity to produce shallow Christians. Mindsets such as this materialize with expectations in their relationship based on what one can receive from God instead of being accountable to God. Also, this mindset minimizes God’s tenets of love, justice, and the overall salvific experience. I propose a model where the focus is on God’s love as the core for any expectation of eradicating domestic violence. Figure 1 below provides a brief snapshot of a suggested “Model of Love.” I must state at this point that this is not an exhaustive model, and that an expanded version may be offered in future writings.

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21. Nancy Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 22.

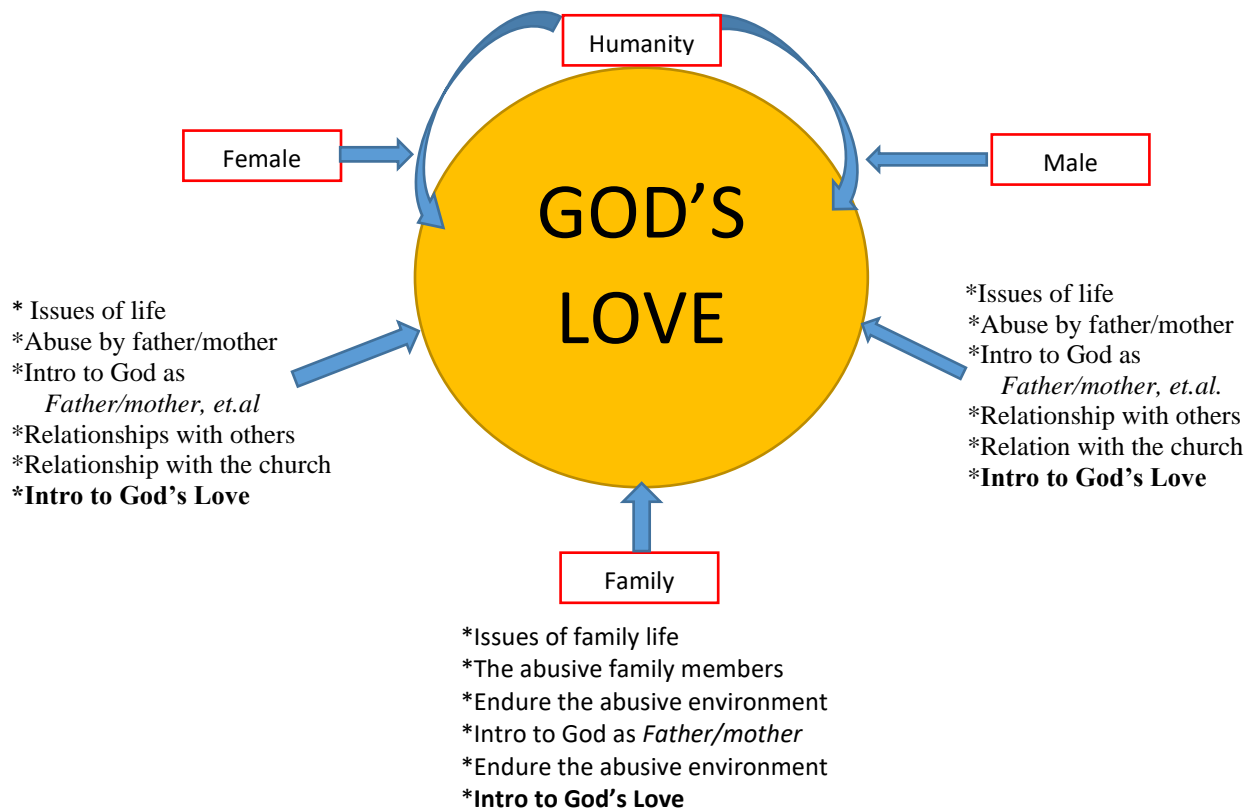


Figure 1. A Model of Love.

Figure 1 depicts a simple model of love. Its intent is to show that everything – every element associated with deliverance from the cycle of domestic violence and abuse – revolves around God’s love and are doomed without God’s love at the center of one’s conversations and methods. For training purposes, the “Model of Love” depicted at figure 1 will begin with the facilitator stressing the fact that God must be at the center of the all activity associated with domestic violence. Next, there will be emphasis placed on the fact that each individual, male, female, and all family members corporately must be active participants in the process towards experiencing the healing power of God as demonstrated in His Love for all of humanity. During training sessions, the facilitator will implement break-out sessions for males, females, children,

and finally families for group discussions. Finally, all groups would come together corporately to discuss how love has been modeled in their lives and families, what love should look and feel like and the impact of God's love as the foundation on which all relationships are established.

It is naïve for me to assume that it is effective and faithful simply to give a list of Scripture texts to be read, schedule the next follow-up appointment, and expect change without experiencing God's love. The Apostle Paul said to the Christians at Corinth "And now abide faith, hope, love these three; but the greatest of these is love."<sup>22</sup> At this juncture, I pose another critical question; how do we as religious leaders demonstrate, express, and convince abusers and their victims that something as *simple* as God's love will eradicate the cycle of domestic violence in their life? In other words, we demonstrate God's love in us for them through our actions; in other words, we live it out as extensions of God's love to them!

Religious abusers will find any available justification to inflict harm with a Bible in hand. I once had an irate abusive husband call me for an appointment for him and his wife in his words, "so I could tell her what Ephesians 5:22 says about *wives obeying husbands*". The simple Love Model as depicted in figure 1 may seem a bit rudimentary, but a primary detriment to leading individuals towards a closer relationship with God can sometimes get lost in the milieu of biblical guidance. Sound Biblical-Christian counseling is a first step towards elimination of domestic violence. Additionally, the plethora of self-help books available on the market is enough to bring directional compass confusion to even the best of us focusing on the issues of care and counseling.

Simple steps designed to help abusers and their victims must be grounded in the love of God always pointing seekers to God's love as the very core of healing and reconciliation. With

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22. 1 Corinthians 13:13.

that being said, the following figure depicts a suggested four-step “path to spiritual growth.”<sup>23</sup>

Identification, Preparation, Accountability, and Spiritual Development indicate what I believe can bring about positive change.

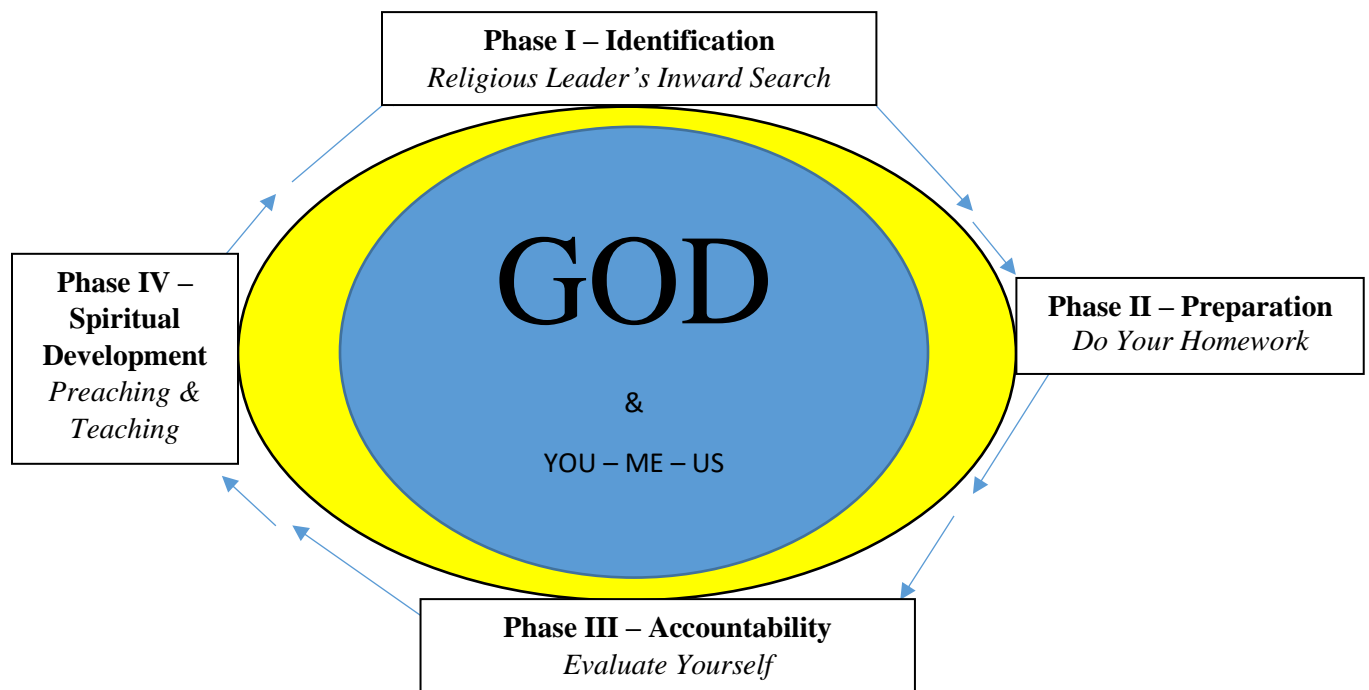


Figure 2. A Path to Spiritual Growth.

### Phase I - Identification

1. Preparation by the Religious Leader
  - a. Assess your relationship level with God
  - b. Identify specific training which qualifies you to provide care and counseling
  - c. Identify and admit your biases and limitations

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23. Phrase borrowed from Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989).

- d. Identify your presuppositions
- e. Identify your readiness
- f. Identify your immediate audience

#### Phase II – Preparation

1. Do your Homework
  - a. Have a plan going in
  - b. Understand the abused and abuser's needs
  - c. What race/ethnicity are the people?
  - d. What are their specific cultural norms?
  - e. Apply cultural competency
  - f. Develop a plan that is clear and attainable
  - g. Execute the plan

#### Phase III – Accountability

1. Evaluate yourself
  - a. Develop an accountability plan i.e., dates, follow-up, phone call, visitations, etc.
  - b. Develop a legitimate referral process
  - c. Hold yourself accountable to the process and know when to refer
  - d. Hold the abused and abuser accountable to God, self, and you
  - e. Hold ministry teams accountable
  - f. Make necessary adjustments along the way
  - g. Develop a contingency plan/safety plan
  - h. Contact the authorities when necessary
  - i. Revisit the plan often

## Phase IV – Spiritual Development

### 1. Your Preaching and Teaching

- a. Craft presentations addressing domestic violence
- b. Remember that you cannot accomplish desired outcomes alone
- c. Make allowances for internal and external partnerships
- d. Have ongoing, long term plans to address and incorporate domestic violence awareness into Sunday morning, or whichever other day is designated when corporate worship gathering takes place.
- e. Conduct ongoing personal and leadership team development

The four phases associated with this “Path to Spiritual Growth” model is by no means presented as the ultimate answer in response to devastation caused by domestic violence. This model presented herein emerged out of personal experience in my role as assistant pastor of a megachurch, and I am compelled to share some of what has worked for me. It was not until I began making mental notation, along with bits and pieces of sticky pad notes that this model emerged. Religious leaders, caregivers, and counselors should take their own sticky pad and mental notes, and prepare written, working guides for self and others seeking resolution to address and hopefully eradicate domestic violence within the church family.

Figure 2 indicate a four-step “Path to Spiritual Growth” separated into “Phase” groupings. Phase I – Identification; Phase II – Preparation; Phase III – Accountability; Phase IV – Spiritual Development. For training purposes each phase will be discussed in detail as a class. The goal is to engage in proactive preparation and self-reflection for pastoral caregivers. The process is cyclical and perpetual because this researcher believes that as a result of participating

in this training what is learned in each session contributes to one's knowledge-base and builds from there. Refresher training will be conducted annually as a part of our leaders training.

Congregational leaders must not continue with a mindset that *Jesus will work it out* telling abusers and their victims just to pray about it and suffer in silence. This is a matter of life and death, spiritually and physically. In Hebrews, the writer states that Jesus “though He was a Son, yet he learned [defined as to increase one's knowledge – be informed – be in the habit of] obedience by the things which He suffered [defined as to be affected by].”<sup>24</sup> Religious leaders already know that Jesus suffered and died on the cross. Pastors and religious leaders should also incorporate the hermeneutical transfer to *here and now* and bridge an understanding that we must increase our knowledge, be informed, and practice continuous learning, just as the biblical model instructs, knowing that a call to ministry is a lifelong call to preparation. Society is directly affected by the ills associated with cycles of domestic violence; therefore, we cannot conduct business as usual and expect different results.

Two sayings come to mind as I consider the ramifications of ignorance and deliberate silence by the church concerning domestic violence. I've heard it said, “If you always do what you've always done, you will always get what you always got.” There is also a snappy saying that goes “You can't teach what you don't know, and you can't lead where you don't go.” These statements may not be fancy, but their essence resounds an eternal truth, and for the church to realize that it is time to do a new thing!

The title of this thesis-project is to address “Congregational Approaches for Christian Clergy and Church Leaders to Educate, Limit, and Eliminate Domestic Violence Within a

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24. Hebrews 5:8.

Christian Context”. In addition to addressing congregational approaches, this thesis-project suggests that care and counseling conducted by religious leaders who have pastoral oversight of congregations must move beyond status-quo and become emboldened to stand against domestic violence at all levels. If we are to eradicate domestic violence and implement measures for the future, then educating oneself is a first step in order to educate others effectively.

I have often heard pastors and church leaders use the phrase “I am going to counsel brother or sister so and so.” While this sounds very professional and Christian-like, I have found such statements and outcomes of their “counseling” sessions to produce more questions than answers, more harm than good, and foster negativity toward the church. Churches must not cater to the temptation of allowing unqualified individuals to provide counseling to members, but to implement internal and external referral processes where necessary to benefit the greater good.

An immediate impact of this thesis will be, incorporate discussions concerning domestic violence into pre-marital and marriage counseling sessions; lead round-table discussion with church clergy and leaders on the impact of domestic violence within our churches; conduct training on sermon preparation and delivery on the topic of domestic violence; develop partnerships with our local organizations; disseminate information and referrals for those in need of information and support concerning domestic violence.

I defend this thesis-project by exploring biblical-theological framework in chapter two. Chapter three reviews pertinent literature, other scholarly writings, and conversations with domestic violence abusers, the abused, clergy, leaders, and the congregation. Chapter four sets forth the project design which consists of: 1) overview of the general project; 2) information gathered from religious leaders about their attempts to confront domestic violence; 3) exploration of the problem today and; 4) anticipated outcomes and issues related to addressing domestic



violence within the congregation. In chapter five I will share outcomes associated with this thesis-project.

A primary challenge confronting this process is that available information regarding domestic violence within my congregation and other Baptist churches in my geographical area may be available but may not be shared for whatever reason. This realization has affected my ministry in this simple way, a lot of work must be done, and my prophetic voice can no longer remain silent. Where will my acquired knowledge take me in the fight against domestic violence within the church? What else needs to be done? (e.g. more analysis of Old Testament and New Testament Scripture to join conversations with fresh hermeneutical considerations; more current raw data collections among African American congregation by geographical regions to determine if certain areas more than others have higher cases of domestic violence, what are leading causes and what is the churches response?)

## CHAPTER TWO

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### **The Theology of the Doctrine of Sin**

The biblical and theological foundations supporting this thesis-project are the heartbeat which gives it life. From a scriptural, biblical, and theological perspective, any attempt to move forward in this writing would be senseless without first defining three terms: theology, doctrine, and sin. Theology in a Christian context is a disciplined “study of religious faith, practice, and experience, especially the study of God and of God's relation to the world.”<sup>1</sup> Doctrine is defined as “scriptural teaching on theological truths.”<sup>2</sup> Sin is defined as “any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.”<sup>3</sup>

In the Old Testament, sin can be defined as *âmâl* which is most often translated as “evil” or “wickedness.” It implies something contrary to God's nature. It carries the implication of that which is deserving of punishment.<sup>4</sup> Another definition for sin in Hebrew is *chata* which means “missing the mark.”<sup>5</sup> Sin in the New Testament is *hamartia* which also means “missing the mark,” offense, or to be sinful, and *paraptoma*, “trespasses” a willful transgression.<sup>6</sup> Sin is

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1. *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, s.v. “theology,” accessed November 30, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theology>.

2. *Quick Reference Dictionary*, Bible Study Tools, s.v. “doctrine,” accessed December 2, 2019, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/doctrine>.

3. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 490.

4. W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1997), s.v. “sin.”

5. *Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon*, Bible Study Tools, s.v. “chata,” <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/nas/chata.html>. Accessed November 24, 2019

6. Vine, Unger, and White, *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, s.v. “sin.”

universal and no one is exempt from the propensity to sin. Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” “All have turned away, all have become corrupt; no one does good, not even one.”<sup>7</sup> The difference is in the ethical and moral choices we make in our relationship with God and with each other.

The “original sin” or “first sin” in the Christian doctrine is the fall of man because of our first parents Adam and Eve’s disobedient and rebellious act of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This disobedience created a great divide in the relationship of humanity with God and with each other. This great divide is sin. As pastors and religious leaders, we must resolve the tension within human nature that the Scripture text points out, “I find therefore the law of my nature to be that when I desire to do what is right, evil is lying in ambush for me.”<sup>8</sup>

“Evil lying in ambush” is a powerful biblical statement that describes the relationship between abusers and the abused in a domestic violence relationship. The word “evil”, an adjective, in the context of this verse clarifies just who we really are without the power of God operating in our lives and includes a mode of thinking, feeling, and acting. John Tulloch, in his book *The Christian Doctrine of Sin*, states,

The idea of evil is in some form or another an external idea and comes before us in Scripture. It comes to man even in its good disguise from the outside. It is a power that surrounds him in life and society. The specter arises from within and not from without. The enemy is in man himself, and not in nature or any symbol drawn from the suggestions of nature or of eternal life.<sup>9</sup>

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7. Psalm 14:3, NIV.

8. Romans 7:21, WEYB.

9. John Tulloch, *The Christian Doctrine of Sin* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Co, 1876), 62.

The beauty of the creation story is that humanity was “created in the image of God” to live in harmony with God and with each other.<sup>10</sup> In the beautiful biblical narrative in Genesis 2:21-25, God makes Adam a helper, a mate, a woman so precious, Adam declares “this is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” When the sin of domestic violence enters a relationship, it damages what was initially created as something holy and beautiful, the loving relationship between a man and a woman. I believe anyone who commits domestic violence suffers from an illness of the soul directly connected to sin.

A primary dilemma facing me, and religious leaders is this; do we articulate to abusers and abused this stark reality, or do we just revert to a comfort zone and *go into prayer*? I am not suggesting that we forgo prayer, but rather that healing and deliverance is achieved by prayer, but also by the rightly divided Word of God, therapy when necessary, community support and follow-up activity, holding all associated with the cycle of abuse accountable. By including in prayer these other spiritual disciplines and resources, theory and practice work together for a positive outcome of healing and wholeness.

As pastor or religious leader, it is incumbent on us to address sin which fuels the domestic violence demon. Based on my experience, many individuals who commit abuse are among the ranks of us who profess to be “born again” Christians. Therefore, the theological concern for me and religious leaders as a whole is what are we to do to address domestic violence within our congregation especially when abusers include church leaders and faithful tithers?

People committing domestic violence against others are not always individuals outside of the community of faith, but often emerge from pulpits to pew – saved men and women, yet all

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10. Genesis 1:27, NIV.

guilty of committing domestic violence. We have painful biblical reminders throughout the sacred text that sin is not just “out there” but “within”. In the synoptic gospels Jesus predicts his betrayal at the table during the Passover meal as “the one who dips his hand in the bowl with me”, one who was close to him, one of his disciples, “one within.”<sup>11</sup> We know from the scriptures it was Judas, but the reality was they all had the propensity to be the betrayer, the one who sinned from within as they ask the question, “Lord is it I?” The Apostle Paul in his letter to the church at Rome declared this warning concerning those within,

I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.<sup>12</sup>

The subtlety of domestic violence at the hands of the abuser is that it is usually always from those closest to the abused, those “within”. At this juncture I pose another simple yet critical question, what should we do? As challenging as ministering to domestic violence abusers may be, there is a biblical model which can guide those abusers and the abused — the “weak”, “those without strength”, those seeking guidance — to the path to God, to do what is just and what is right.

Further strengthening the theological foundation for the biblical model mentioned previously, I submit the following scripture; “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”<sup>13</sup> Our call to the

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11. Matthew 24:21-25; Mark 14:18-21; Luke 22:21-23; John 13:21-30, NIV.

12. Romans 16:17-19, NIV.

13. Galatians 6:10, NIV.

household of faith is to condemn the sin and show godly love to promote repentance, and restoration for the sinner. “Opportunity” is not restricted to waiting for the moment to present itself, but rather includes making room for the moment, making room for opportunity. When searching for practical applications in scripture, the exegete’s hermeneutical reach must expand beyond written pages in support material and allow the Holy Spirit to provide guidance and transformation beyond the pages.

### **The Theology of Liberation and Empowerment**

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans states, “Now we who are strong have an obligation to bear the weaknesses of those without strength, and not to please ourselves.”<sup>14</sup> This writing by the Apostle Paul is a clarion call to the Romans then, as well as to us today, to support those who are “weak” and “without strength” because the goal of support is, when all is said and done, God’s love abiding in us contributing to a reversal of human failure.

As men and women called by God, we are empowered by the aid of the Holy Spirit to confront all sin to include domestic violence. The faithful biblical accounts give witness to this fact. “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”<sup>15</sup> “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”<sup>16</sup>

I am not advocating for domestic violence abusers to go unchecked, but rather contend that those of us who are prepared to confront abusers, with the goal of glorifying God because of

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14. Romans 15:1, HCSB.

15. Isaiah 41:10, ESV.

16. 2 Corinthians 12:9, NIV.

God's power to overcome the abuser's "weakness" through transformation and by the "renewing of their mind" is of utmost importance.<sup>17</sup> Only then is liberation and empowerment attainable to all concerned as we depend on the One "who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us."<sup>18</sup> Proclaiming to the one held in the grip and bondage of domestic violence there is power in the name of Jesus to break every stronghold.

*The Amplified Bible* says that we are to "appreciate those who diligently work among you, who are in charge over you...and who give you instruction."<sup>19</sup> Regarding the context of this verse, I understand that the Apostle Paul was addressing the church at Thessalonica about various problems disturbing the Christians, problems primarily of an eschatological nature, and concerning events that will precede the imminent return of Christ. While I acknowledge this fact, an additional hermeneutical horizon that emerges from this text could include congregational leaders with specialized training in the area of domestic violence.

When domestic violence is uncovered within the congregation, as leaders we must compel abusers to comply with Holy Scripture's instructions. While this presents a daunting task when minds have already been filled with distorted thinking and reality, we must trust the power of God to do inward work. While abusers become a work in progress, by no means should we condone their abusive ways by allowing it to continue unchecked.

We are charged to do *good* to all of humanity and transitioning to here and now, and taking advantage of the hermeneutical transfer point in the letter to the Galatians as well as parallel to the Galatians writing, we as pastors and other church leaders must take advantage of

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17. Romans 12:2.

18. Ephesians 3:20, ESV.

19.1 Thessalonians 5:12, AMP.

opportunities to do *good*. Abusive acts should never be condoned, while at the same time the love of God must outweigh any wrongdoing by born again Christians. I am certain that one can be born again yet suffer demonic oppression. Christian theology must not be limited to that which makes us comfortable but extend well beyond the boundaries which pastors and Christian leaders has established, “especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”<sup>20</sup> Drawing lines between who we believe are saved and those whom we believe are not places us into the role of the Divine which is completely out of order. Again, Galatians 6:10 says “let us do good” which in the case of this directive requires passive participation because the process of *letting* cannot take place unless we initiate it from within.

Pastors and religious leaders must operate by faith, and with the attitude that even if we do not see immediate results it does not diminish God’s ability and power. Although domination and control are often the goal of domestic violence abusers, we must not limit God in our finite thinking nor create mental pictures of God as one who is “controlling.”

Opportunities to do good to all, especially those who are guilty of committing domestic violence, *and* who belong to the family of believers suggests that it is appropriate to show favoritism towards other believers because when all is said and done, we all are part of God’s family. Human frailty, carnal thinking, and shortcomings of pastors and church leaders have the tendency to pick and choose where the issues of helping abusers and in some cases the abused are concerned, but that should not be the case.

Faith of believers within the household of faith is not always actualized within the timeframe we establish for God to do what God does. Clergy and church leaders everywhere

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20. Galatians 6:10, KJV.



should be especially concerned for all born again believers. The challenge is that not everyone within the household of faith are delivered from their past and present sin-laden predicaments.

Is it difficult to be just and unbiased when dealing with a domestic violence abuser? I say emphatically YES! Especially, when you have been personally affected by domestic violence at some point in your life. I am certain you recall Jesus' words after he had been beaten, after he had been spat upon, after the crown of thorns was placed on his head, after he had been nailed to the cross. Jesus said, "Father forgive them. . ." <sup>21</sup>

This biblical model sends a strong message for me in my role within my church, and within the Christian community to follow that model even when faced with the difficulty of having compassion for domestic violence abusers as well as the abused. It is my opinion that too many pastors and religious leaders are guilty of looking the other way or offering a quick fix in response to domestic violence. Acknowledgement demands responsibility. I suggest the reason for such an attitude is because a quick fix is easier than a long-term care and cure approach. Long-term fixes require having a strategic plan of action which takes time and commitment as opposed to holding a board meeting to vote members in or out, seeking a letter of resignation, or sending them away with a prayer and a "just hang in there it will get better" or "have faith in God."

In response to the lack of adequate planning to help both the abuser and abused I offer a position taken by Kirk Byron Jones in his book *Addicted to Hurry* which suggests that there is idolatry associated with hurrying, and I might also add *hurry* to quick solutions in cases of domestic violence. Jones states,

Hurry is often cited as a contributing factor in tragedies resulting in accidents and loss of life.... Unintentionally but sadly, we go about our frenzied multitasking and leave

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21. Luke 23:24, KJV.

children to accept our complete absence or our divided attention when we are present. There is a grave unsung crisis in the land, *being too hurried to give serious attention to our children between crises*. “author emphasis.”<sup>22</sup>

At this point it is imperative to address what may occur within my congregation as a result of parental neglect whether intentional or unintentional. As a result of currently living in the DMV metropolitan area, hurrying becomes a way of life.<sup>23</sup> Babysitting, latchkey home alone kids, interstate driving, fast food restaurants, car washes, lawn maintenance services, and house cleaning companies are very popular— a staple, a way of life. The average residents living in the DMV do not have time, or it just may be that they will not take time, to attend to what I consider most basic chores themselves. Conversations at gatherings are often centered on the length of time you commute, the type of work one does, and titles thereby establishing *pecking order*. While ensuring that we can continue to eat as a result of our work, I believe that idolatry associated with hurry can have grave consequences for individuals and families, especially children. Our homes become emotional tinder boxes ready to ignite at any moment and a domestic violence incidence is just one emotional outburst away from a fire.

Included later in this thesis-project is an excerpt from Shane Clifton which recount a brief story by Lauren McGrow. McGrow talked about growing up in the grips of domestic violence and how grandma “covered the hole in the bathroom wall to hide evidence which resulted from domestic violence” and how “[grandma] couldn't afford to get it fixed [so] she decorated around the violence.”<sup>24</sup> Domestic violence is too often *covered up* and the cycle passes from one person,

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22. Kirk Byron Jones, *Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003), xvii.

23. The DMV metropolitan area includes District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia.

24. Shane Clifton, “Spirit, submission, power, and abuse: a response to teaching on female submission and the scourge of domestic violence,” *St Mark's Review* 243 (January 2018): 76, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327882854\\_Spirit\\_submission\\_power\\_and\\_abuse\\_a\\_response\\_to\\_teaching\\_on\\_female\\_submission\\_and\\_the\\_scurge\\_of\\_domestic\\_abuse\\_St\\_Mark's\\_Review\\_243\\_2018](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327882854_Spirit_submission_power_and_abuse_a_response_to_teaching_on_female_submission_and_the_scurge_of_domestic_abuse_St_Mark's_Review_243_2018), 72-86. Accessed September 10, 2019.

one generation to the next. There are proponents on both sides of the argument regarding whether generational curses are in fact a phenomenon which can be passed on.

This writer, religious leaders, and colleagues must no longer be guilty of failing to address the primary problem which haunts domestic violence abusers and the abused which is lack of “strength”. We must remember abusers and the abused alike are *weak* and powerless and cannot help themselves. The truth of the matter is if we possessed the ability to help ourselves then there would be no need to call on the name of the Lord – we could just *deliver ourselves or themselves* from the presenting demonic oppression. Applying scripture and follow-up pastoral involvement are the primary tools that religious leaders must have to confront and hopefully eliminate an abusive situation. In the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul states that “God’s Word is in fact God’s power which can bring about salvation.”<sup>25</sup> God’s power and salvation do not discriminate based on color, creed, ethnicity nor other human frailty or sin, not even domestic violence. Whosoever will, let them come!

### **The Theology of Sound Leadership**

When attempting to strengthen and build up abusers and the abused, pastors and religious leaders must not allow outside pressure like the media or a person’s status or position to dictate how we deal with specific cases of domestic violence. Ministry teams which consist of pastors and other leaders must approach their responsibilities as did the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans. He begins by surveying the spiritual condition of humanity, concluding all are sinners and in need of salvation. That salvation has been provided by God through Jesus Christ and his

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25. Romans 1:16, NIV.

redemptive work on the cross. But the only way this redemptive power is activated to change the life and behavior of the abuser and abused is through their faith in Jesus Christ.

There have been occasions where domestic violence abusers contacted me requesting counseling for those whom they have abused and articulated to me how they envisioned such a session should proceed. One such case the abuser stated to me, “I am requesting a session for me and my wife so that you can explain to her the duties of a wife based on scripture.” That husband expected me to help him *Bible beat* his wife into submission so that he could have a green light to continue his sinful – weak, without strength – ways. I did not then, nor will I ever agree to support the abusive behavior surrounding domestic violence of any kind with scripture. Again, this is where training in handling domestic violence situations becomes critical in possibly saving a life or lives.

Sallie McFague contends that our views of who or what God is or isn’t are oftentimes skewed because the propensity to make God to be what we most desire at any time can be metaphorical and mythological and must be reevaluated. McFague further suggests,

We do not know very much and that we should not camouflage our ignorance by either petrifying our metaphors or forgetting that our concepts derive from metaphors.... So we try out different models and metaphors [of God] in an attempt to talk about what we do not know how to talk about; the relationship between God and the world, from a Christian perspective, for our time.<sup>26</sup>

Challenges associated with establishing boundaries regarding domestic violence abusers and the abused must include God’s *power* ability, and Jesus’ *saving* ability. Pastors and church leaders must be honest with themselves and realize their lack of specialized training when attempting to

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26. Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), xii.

provide help, health, and healing for victims of domestic violence. Also, without God's power and presence, the religious leader is ineffective in confronting domestic violence situations.

Within Christian homes, or at least that is what we call them, there exists the spoken or unspoken fact that the man is the head of the house, the woman is always subject to the man, and children must obey parents. While this is in fact true according to the biblical model, "weak" and "without strength" Christian households must hold such facts in context. Throughout biblical history the idea of patriarchal and matriarchal leadership is well documented. This author believes the problem facing society today lies not in the truth of this biblical model, but when scripture is often taken out of context in order to satisfy one or the other's insatiable appetite for power.

Jason Meyer, a contributor at TheGospelCoalition.org published an article entitled "A Complementarian Manifesto Against Domestic Abuse: What is Hyper-Headship." Meyer states the following,

Complementarians theological view in Christianity [that men and women have different but complementary roles and responsibilities in marriage, family life, and religious leadership] believe biblical marriage should display the model of Christ's marriage to his bride, the church. We believe each gender has a distinct part to play in that picture. God calls the man to take the lead in loving his wife in a lay-down-your-life, Christ-like manner. God gives the woman the responsibility to receive that loving Christ-like leadership in a submissive and respectful church-like manner. Hyper-headship destroys that picture. The husband abuses his headship in a self-centered and self-serving manner. He may be self-centered and self-serving in a covertly aggressive way that refuses to do anything to serve his wife or family in a godly manner. Or he may be self-centered and self-serving in a harsh, oppressive, controlling way. Self-serving lordship isn't Christ-like leadership, for Christ gives himself for his bride. Harsh lordship isn't Christ-like leadership, for Christ doesn't abuse his bride. He doesn't treat her harshly.<sup>27</sup>

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27. Jason Meyer, "A Complementarian Manifesto Against Domestic Abuse: What is Hyper-Headship," The Gospel Coalition, December 2, 2015, accessed January 6, 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/a-complementarian-manifesto-against-domestic-abuse/2015>.

Borrowing the term “hyper-leadership” from Meyer, I expand this type of leadership, attributing the ill-guided role to both male and female because once again domestic violence does not discriminate, it is an equal opportunity exploiter.

In the New Testament the Apostle Paul lays out a blueprint regarding the household code i.e., “wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands.... Husbands love your wives and be not bitter against them.... Children obey your parents in all things for this is well pleasing to the Lord.... Fathers provoke not your children to anger.... Servants obey in all things your masters according to the flesh.... And whatsoever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not to men.”<sup>28</sup> There exist domestic violence abusers, abused, pastors, and church leaders who are sometimes misguided regarding this text. It is a tragedy that there are individuals who willfully misappropriate scripture to justify or tolerate ill-informed demonic behavior disguised as Christian guidance for abusive situations and self-serving purposes, creating *functional-dysfunctional* families.

If the abuser and abused are to navigate out of ongoing violent encounters, it is imperative to one’s Christian freedom to adopt the theology in Colossians where “Christology is central and everything else flows from the belief that Christ is the key to the understanding of reality.”<sup>29</sup> This begs the question, what is reality? In the twisted minds of domestic violence abusers, reality may be *confined* to his or her distorted thinking patterns which they support by a misappropriation of scripture.

Howard E. Friend Jr. in his book entitled *Recovering the Sacred Center* contends that it is “imperative to experiencing freedom in Christ that one should pursue recovering the sacred

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28. Colossians 3:18-23, KJV.

29. Andrew T. Lincoln, “The Letter to the Colossians,” *New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. XI (Nashville: Abington Press, 2000), 569.

center.”<sup>30</sup> He suggests that finding the sacred center is like understanding the Kingdom of God. Friend quotes Jesus as saying, “The Kingdom of God is ‘like’ . . . , Jesus never says the Kingdom of Heaven ‘is’ because it is a mystery.”<sup>31</sup> There is no simple *name it and claim it* or *believe until you receive* approach as some would suggest. To experience the Kingdom of God requires an intimate relationship with Christ, and once discovered it is a source of personal and congregational transformation.

To further understand God’s relationship with humanity, and vice-versa demands that one allow the Holy Spirit to assist in the unfolding “mystery” in scripture. Speaking to this unknown - then known aspect of scripture, Friend addresses the *mystery* aspect of personal transformation by offering the following,

Raquel developed her own unique way of coaxing the highest and best from her students, both musical and mystical. I watched her one day in her living room as she worked with a young tenor. Technically, you are gifted. But something, *something* is missing. She stood up, walked slowly towards him, and then placed her hand on his chest. “Let me help you discover your song, the song of your heart,” she said. “Hear it first. Then I’ll help you sing it. But until you hear your song, don’t sing.”<sup>32</sup>

If those of us serving as pastors and church leaders are to help abusers and the abused, then I suggest that both abuser and the abused must first hear God’s voice, and then and only then are they empowered to discover what God is saying, “sing” - speak the interpreted mystery, and then live out the *mystery* of the Kingdom of God.

Exploring further into Howard Friend’s writing I suggest posing two of the same questions posed in his workshops; (1) *Who or what is your “inner self”?* and (2) *How do you*

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30. Howard E. Friend, Jr., *Recovering the Sacred Center: Church Renewal form the Inside out*. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1998), 22.

31. Friend, *Recovering the Sacred Center*, 22.

32. Friend, *Recovering the Sacred Center*, 24.

*connect to your inner self?* Friend suggests that the *inner self* is one's journey to God. In one's attempt to journey to God, and with the focus on domestic violence, one's journey to God does not always begin in a religious or formal church setting. I am convinced that there are some abusers whose journey to God begins only after being incarcerated for various crimes, or some other form of hardship which oftentimes is due to violence against intimate partners, family members, and others. Shane Clifton writes,

Domestic violence is an issue that confronts women more than it does men, and there are not enough women preaching for the topic to be given serious attention in the pulpit. The Scriptures themselves were written mostly by men and, as a result, they rarely reference the topic directly; this is an absence that continues in churches that normally practice expository preaching. Even so, pastors concerned about the issue of domestic violence could easily draw on the Bible's thorough ongoing critique of violence and reversals of power, which are readily related to women's experiences in the church and home.<sup>33</sup>

Christie Cozad Neuger, in her book *Counseling Women: A Narrative Pastoral Approach* states the following as it relates to theology,

Many of the foundational assumptions of pastoral counseling have been challenged by the various liberation movements of the past few decades. These challenges take a variety of shapes. Theology has been challenged by women who have experienced a dominant father God as exclusive and negative in a culture where dominant males have done a great deal of harm.<sup>34</sup>

Down through history, hierarchy and patriarchy have been instrumental in shaping the system of authority, even in the church and womanhood has suffered tremendously as a result. In order to establish a connection with God, pulpits everywhere should be available, and open to both male and female clergy and religious leaders. Whether churches agree on the legitimacy of ordained women ministers and pastors or not does not lessen the seriousness of domestic

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33. Shane Clifton, "Spirit, submission, power, and abuse: a response to teaching on female submission and the scourge of domestic violence," *St. Mark's Review*, 243 (2018): 74.

34. Christie Cozad Neuger, *Counseling Women: A Narrative Pastoral Approach* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001), 56.



violence against women. My clergy sisters are advancing to the front of the church and into pulpits and leadership roles that allow them to give voice to issues like domestic violence where the church has been noticeably silent for far too long, sometimes even breaking the silence with their own stories of abuse, liberation, transformation, and survival. In scripture we have occasions where women voices were loud and clear, thereby liberating their sisters and brothers through the preaching of the gospel and their story. She becomes the voice no longer crying in the wilderness longing to be heard.

It is unfortunate that for years male dominance within churches restricted female voices. Glass ceilings are real, and ongoing attempts to break those ceilings often result in shatters which oftentimes are quickly repaired with little or no further mentioning. In the book *I found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader*, Dr. Katie G. Cannon offers,

Preaching in the black church is as much affected by issues of misogyny, androcentricity and patriarchy as by homiletical form within this complex discursive construction of sacred rhetoric, women and men who cast their lot with us must make an intervention, no matter how slight, in the dominate religious discourse of our times. We can provide precise answers to the questions of 1) how meaning is constructed, 2) whose interests are served, and 3) what kinds of worlds are envisioned in sacred rhetoric. Every choice that the preacher makes in constructing a sermon will have certain connotations, inherited from its forebears among the sermons that preceded it.<sup>35</sup>

Dr. Cannon's statements speak directly to the issue of domestic violence. Historically in the male dominated preaching arena the rhetorical signature has been, and in some cases continues to be self-serving, skewed towards connotations which still promote male dominance. At this juncture I must share the direct quote by Lauren McGrow, a portion of which is previously mentioned

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35. Dr. Katie G. Cannon, "Womanist Interpretation and Preaching in the Black Church," in Mitzi J. Smith, *I found God in Me. A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock publishers, 2015), 67.

which help in driving home the point of how women have been silenced, and young girls taught to accept domestic violence as a way of life, and to tolerate it,

Religious messages of obedience and second-class status encourage women to absorb a sort of violence, covered over with piety that I first witnessed with my Grandma and then repeatedly as I grew up.... The most striking memory I have is going to the toilet at her house. In the bathroom, a hole had been smashed in the wall directly opposite the toilet seat. It was a shock to see as you were peeing. Grandma covered the hole with a cheap orange wall hanging that had Psalm 23 printed on it. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters."<sup>36</sup>

This represents a stark reminder as to how easy it is to be lured into a subtle acceptance of abusive behavior. What really struck at my core was, "so she decorated around the violence."

God has not called and prepared us pastors and other religious leaders to *decorate around* domestic violence or ignore it all together with subtle misinterpretation of scripture or stern instructions to be subject to one another.

As I continue educating myself and seek ways to confront and eradicate domestic violence within my congregation and community, it is to be remembered and kept at the forefront of all healing attempts that God is the foundation for all Christian theological reflection towards justification. Even in attempts to bring healing to victims of abuse, I, as well as others, must never forget that the person or persons sitting in front of us deserves to be heard, valued, and loved by us, thereby experiencing, through us, the transformative love of God. At that presenting moment I may not feel like loving them or I may feel as if they do not deserve to be loved, which I contend is not abnormal because we are human, but it is at those moments that the power and love of God must have the preeminence. We must love the person but condemn the sinful acts of abusive behavior.

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36. Clifton, "Spirit, submission, power, and abuse," 76.

Reverting to Sally McFague, in her book entitled *Models of God* she addresses “The Monarchical Model” [of God] and states,

In the portrayal of God’s relation to the world, the dominant western historical model [of God] has been that of absolute monarch ruling over His kingdom.... It is a powerful imaginative picture and a very dangerous one.... Gordon Kaufman calls a pattern of “asymmetrical dualism” between God and the world, in which God and the world are only distantly related and all power, either as domination or benevolence, is on God’s side. It supports conceiving God as being existing somewhere apart from the world and ruling it externally either directly through divine intervention or indirectly through controlling the wills of his subjects... [With respect to this mindset it presents] three major flaws in the monarchical model, God is distant from the world, relates only to the human world, and controls that world through domination and benevolence.<sup>37</sup>

A critical part of theological undergirding as it relates to addressing and curbing domestic violence within congregations, God’s participation and power to deliver abusers and the abused from the grips of oppressive spirits occurs through partnership with believers. We cannot afford to approach God for assistance as if God will act as puppet-master. Human limitations have the propensity to create images – models of God which can only lift heavy burdens and oppressions only when *the monarch* feels compelled to do so.

The mantra for pastors and religious leaders must hinge on the fact that before I can help others, I first must ask God to help me! The process of humbling oneself is no easy task. There is a song by Dr. Charles G. Hayes and The Cosmopolitan Church of Prayer which says, “Just turn it over to Jesus and he’ll work it out.”<sup>38</sup> I submit to you that while Jesus can and does “work it out”, the process of getting to the *worked-out* phase appears elusive at best.

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37. Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 64.

38. Dr. Charles G. Hayes, “Jesus Can Work It Out,” Lyrics.com, 1999, accessed January 27, 2020, <https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/2749369/Dr.+Charles+G.+Hayes/Jesus+Can+Work+It+Out>.

I will not attempt to argue the point at this writing but what I will interject at this point is Ezekiel's prophecy; "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."<sup>39</sup> In this writing of Ezekiel, Israel's exilic saga was concluding, all of which occurred due to their failure to honor prophetic instruction from God. At the time of Ezekiel's prophecy, the "rebellious house" of Israel had failed to honor its covenant obligations, therefore Yahweh would bring the covenant curses upon them, including deportation, destruction and death.<sup>40</sup> In order to strengthen *weak* abusers and the abused with a biblical construct where God is primary guide, the process requires much prayer and meditation, both individually and collectively.

Time has a way either to soften or harden one's heart towards prophetic instructions. Society is not much different today than in times past. Ezekiel's audience at times loved Yahweh because of what they received, and not so much for what they were willing to give. Ezekiel says the house of Israel was rebellious – always looking for a quick way, *hurried way* out of situations whether in captivity, in the desert, or in times of freedom. Their initial actions expressed their love for Yahweh, but not long afterwards reverted to sinful, idolatrous activity which I want to suggest was the intent of their hearts anyway. Since sin has a way of being contagious, again I ask, do the sins of fathers and mothers affect their children?

The prophecy of Ezekiel, "the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge," carries with it avenues for ongoing theological conversation. What I want to suggest is this, there are consequences for future generations, if not because of one's present father and mother's sins or sinful ways, at least because of Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of

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39. Ezekiel 18:2b, KJV.

40. Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, "The Book of Ezekiel," *New Interpreters Bible*, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abington Press, 2001), 1084.

Eden. Children will mimic what they see, and when done, often enough, has strong propensity to become a way of life.

Darr, addressing Ezekiel's phrase "eating sour grapes," informs us that during the time of and prior to this statement there were *gatherers* who picked grapes prematurely, grapes which were quite bitter and not ready to be consumed by adults nor by children. One of the outcomes of children eating sour grapes was their teeth became "blunted – dulled,"<sup>41</sup> thus the phrase "set on edge" represents some sort of deformity, or abnormality. At this point I want to suggest that domestic violence abusers and the abused can and do become products of premature exposure to others committing abuse and parental neglect resulting in *hurried, blunted, dull* views of the realities of life. Not all children who have been abused or witnessed domestic violence committed upon others turn out to be abusers themselves but may do just the complete opposite.

In my role as Assistant Pastor, and for other members of leadership teams, we have an awesome responsibility to present and future generations, and it begins with ministry to parents. I am convinced that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous person produces good outcomes.<sup>42</sup> Just imagine little children seeing holes in walls covered with rags and pictures, having to become adults prematurely – kids trying to protect mommy from daddy's fists. Such premature exposure – such *eating sour grapes* resulting in stunted growth, *blunted and dulled* attitudes – becomes a way of life which, if left unchecked and not attended to with God's Word and the saving power of Christ, will indeed become a tradition carried over into the present and future generations.

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41. "Qahah," Blue Letter Bible, accessed January 27, 2020, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=H6949&t=KJV>.

42. James 5:16, paraphrased.

Training against domestic violence must begin with young children. Scripture informs us that “foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it from him.”<sup>43</sup> So just what is this rod, and how should it be administered? I have often heard this Scripture quoted as justification to exact corporal punishment upon children, but is this really what the scripture is saying? On closer examination of this “rod”, I understand the Hebrew word *shebet*, translated “rod”, to mean “staff, scepter, and shaft of a spear or dart.”<sup>44</sup> This connotation is not limited to the rod’s use for striking, but more importantly to leading, and guiding for the purpose of correction and safety. Some translations of the Scripture plainly state “spanking” and does not refer to correction in a broader sense.

Critical to accomplishing that which the title of this thesis-project focuses on is for pastors and church leaders to hold congregants, which include domestic violence abusers and the abused, accountable. Attendance at Bible Study, Sunday school, and church meetings should be mandatory for membership. Sounds a bit harsh. Yes it is, but I would rather have those members whom God has entrusted to my care and leaders present, although maybe a bit irritated with me for holding them accountable, but through the Word of God, and power of the Holy Spirit there may be divine transformation for all concerned.

To eliminate domestic violence within the congregation, as church leaders, it is imperative that we approach scripture with critical eyes and ears while at the same time give one’s full, intelligent attention to its *meaning-making* aspects. Too often it seems we apply our *learned* hermeneutical elements and terminate the process when we feel that we have checked all

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43. Proverbs 22:15, KJV.

44. “Shebet,” Blue Letter Bible, accessed January 27, 2020, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H7626&t=KJV>.

the boxes. We must go beyond – further in and deeper down in scripture – so that the result is an educated challenge to status-quo biblical interpretation.

Kenyatta R. Gilbert, professor of Homiletics at Howard University School of Divinity, offers what I believe is a telling challenge to approach scripture with full armor. Gilbert, in his contribution to the *New Interpreters Handbook of Preaching* under the heading “Suspicion,” offers the following,

If biblical books had authors whose intentions were to engage specific auditors in their distinct social environments, at what point(s) do post-moderns also listen as intended recipients? Paul Ricoeur affirmed that the meaning of a text is never a function purely of facts about the author and his or her original public. So, the question then becomes, how do these ancient sacred texts speak, and what do they mean for us today? ... Postmodern listeners...are highly suspicious of preaching characterized by the three *c*'s – closure, certainty, or control.... [David] Walker's hermeneutic [of suspicion] supplies a significant early source where suspicion and militancy become the means for drastic social change.... [Suspicion] urges preachers to appreciate the fact that biblical texts can supply a fecundity [the ability to produce many new ideas] of meaning without univocal limitation.<sup>45</sup>

I do not suggest renegade interpretative mentality, nor abandoning techniques and scholarly contributions past and present which add to the makeup of sound biblical interpretation. What I am suggesting is that those of us who serve as congregational leaders confront domestic violence with hatred of the act without destroying the humanity of abusers and abused. As I look at and imagine the whole of domestic violence within my congregation I am left with some unanswered questions while at the same time left with a challenging question, what now? As for me, I honor and yield to the fact that there are privileged – pastor only – sermon topics unless given opportunity and authority to speak on a topic such as domestic violence within the congregational setting. In my current situation it is not so much an issue of *How* but rather *When*.

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45. Kenyatta R. Gilbert, “Suspicion,” in *New Interpreters Handbook of Preaching*, Paul Scott Wilson, ed. (Nashville: Abington Press, 2008), 55-57.

Armed with what I now know as a result of research for this thesis-project, I am charged with creating conversation with the senior pastor and church leaders regarding domestic violence, and how we, together as members of church leadership become the healing agents nurturing a healing community to embrace and provide the necessary resources to those affected by domestic violence so that all may be made whole.



## CHAPTER THREE

### LITERATURE REVIEW

I attended a two-day seminar, which also included an additional 40 hours of training, in Manassas, Virginia entitled “Domestic Violence Essentials” sponsored by Action in Community Through Service (ACTS).<sup>1</sup> It included the following topics: Becoming an Active Listener, Behavioral Intervention, Continuum of Violence, Understanding the Abuse Triangle, and LGBT/Elder Abuse/Military/Disabled. ACTS Core Training Manual states that not everyone is cut out to become a “crisis listener”. In the listening process, the ACTS training manual further states that feelings are both expressed and implied, and that listeners are to use “silence appropriately” and “terminate conversations appropriately.” While on the surface this appears simple, there exists a strong tendency for pastors and church leaders to be silent when they should speak up and talk *too* much when an attentive listening ear is needed. The expectation at times from the congregant and pastors is as pastors we should have the answer for any situation at any given time. When, truth be told, there are times when the matter at hand is beyond our professional training and spiritual insight. The ability to provide Christian guidance sometimes is as simple as providing a ministry of presence and the courage, when needed, to refer the case to someone with more experience and training. Prayer and guidance by the Holy Spirit is essential to confronting domestic violence abusers and the abused and there is a thin line between God’s way and our way.

The ability to be empathetic with abusers is challenging at best, because how do pastors and church leaders minister empathetically to one who is abusing his or her spouse or intimate

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1. ACTS, accessed January 11, 2020, <https://www.actspwc.org/>.

partner? Such a tall order does not come naturally, and it requires a power greater than us which, I contend, can only come by the power of God. It is important for us to remain objective and commit to what is right for all concerned. Managing the expectations of all is key in my role serving as assistant pastor, when there is a strong urge to provide answers at specific presenting sessions due simply to the nature of my role. There is an assumption that the “pastor” will always know what to do and say. A member who is a family therapist once said to me, “I thought you all [meaning clergy] were trained in the area of family conflict and domestic violence.”

As a pastoral care giver, I do not want members to leave feeling as if I did not help them, but I also want to ensure it is the right kind of help. Scripture declares “all things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient.”<sup>2</sup> The context which the Apostle Paul was addressing is that contention existed between and among church groups based on who was leading the group; i.e. some were followers of Paul, some of Apollos, some of Cephas, and some of Christ. A hermeneutical horizon which emerges as a result of hermeneutical “suspicion” out of such a contentious situation is that “expediency” is not restricted to the here and now.<sup>3</sup>

Amid growing world recognition of the problems women face, everyday fears, the bruises and battering they experience, and the needs of their children for safety and security. Where are the churches? Why have religious groups been so slow to recognize violence against women and so slow to respond to victims’ cries for help? Indeed, amid the ever-increasing numbers of men and women world-wide who recognize the severity of woman abuse and have personal and professional commitment to work toward elimination, where are God’s people, called in God’s name to bring healing in the midst of suffering?

By and large, a “holy hush” pervades religious organizations. Violence is ugly, and most churches and their leaders feel uncomfortable talking about it and ill-equipped to respond to its victims. The issue is very sensitive, and many people and pastors alike

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2. 1 Corinthians 6:12, KJV.

3. Kenyatta R. Gilbert, “Suspicion,” in *New Interpreters Handbook of Preaching*, ed. Paul Scott Wilson (Nashville: Abington Press, 2008), 55.

would prefer to sweep it under the proverbial church carpet. Moreover, violence touches many people at the core of their being, because they either recognize in them the tendency to control others or have suffered humiliation at the hands of someone else.

Let's face our reluctance head-on; the reality and consequence of violence makes most Christian people, indeed most any people anywhere very uncomfortable. As people of God, we would prefer to think abuse does not occur in our churches' families. So we act as if it were someone else's problem, something we do not need to contend with ourselves.

But violence is everyone's problem. It is an issue that is not going away. It is prevalent in our churches and in the communities our churches serve. We need to crawl out from under the church carpet and admit that we have been hiding from the problem, sometimes contributing to it, and not very committed to being part of the solution.<sup>4</sup>

Kroeger and Nason-Clark argue that not only can churches play a role but churches also have a responsibility in stopping the abuse of women. Recognizing the complex nature of abuse and reflecting on the evangelical Church, through *No Place for Abuse*, Kroeger (a church historian) and Nason-Clark (a sociologist) challenge Christians to stand in opposition to the abuse of women, to promote nonviolent family living, and to work together with secular organizations and caregivers to eliminate woman abuse.

Dr. David A. Currie in his blog "Opportunities In Ministry To Ask About Safety," raised a great point when he was asked during his annual physical exam. "Do you feel safe at home?" Dr. Currie stated, that just as a physician does not feel or is made to look less of a physician when this question is asked as a checkup to his patients, pastor should not feel threatened or feel less of a pastor if this type of question is "woven naturally into the rhythms of pastoral care and ministry. He further states since someone in authority, who potentially could do something to resolve the problem, is asking, those experiencing domestic violence are empowered, and abusers are cautioned their actions may not go unnoticed forever.<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Currie's blog gave me pause as I reflected on a diagram I have on my refrigerator at home and posted in plain sight to all who enter my office with different facial expressions like (sad, happy, fearful, angry, etc.) under the caption "How do you feel today?" This is my way of

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4. Kroeger, Catherine Clark, and Nancy Nason-Clark. *No Place for Abuse: Biblical & Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010.15-16.

5. Currie, David, A. 2019. "Opportunities In Ministry To Ask About Safety." accessed February 22, 2020, The RAVE (Religion And Violence E-Learning) Project Blog. September 4, 2019. <https://www.theraveproject.org/online-training/>.

taking the pulse of congregants during pastoral care and counseling visits. It is an easy non-threatening conversation starter for all ages and genders as we navigate the waters of challenging relationships or everyday life issues.

Johnnie Lorren, in his Bible Study Guide entitled *Domestic Violence in OUR Church?* quotes Carol Cannon in addressing the topic “Passing it Down”, “If a parent is abusive in any way – if he [or she] overeats, overworks, or overdoses anything to the neglect of his [or her] family – that behavior will affect his [or her] children’s lives for years to come...being attracted to dysfunctional people, medicating their emotions with compulsive behavior, or becoming addicts themselves.”<sup>6</sup>

Lorren continues,

All too often, Christians have hung our hats on belonging to a strong group of people headed for heaven. We believe that our *own* salvation is the most important issue, and *secondarily*, we hope we can bring friends and family with us.

Salvation, of course, is what God wants for us all. This is so evident in Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary. But should my own salvation be my main goal? Is heaven, eternal life, and endless rewards where I should place my focus? Was that Christ’s main focus when he came to earth? Or was he willing to take the chance of never seeing his father again in order to save someone else? With Jesus, it was all about others. How should this knowledge guide us as parents or family members [and pastor and church leaders] in our interactions with our family and friends [and within my congregation]?<sup>7</sup>

Earlier in the thesis-project, in Chapter Two, I put forth the biblical position, “children’s teeth are set on edge because of sins of the fathers.”<sup>8</sup> Lorren further gives what I believe is additional support to the fact that domestic violence and abuse is learned behavior. Various

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6. Carol Cannon, *Never Good Enough. Growing Up Imperfect in a “Perfect” Family: How to Break the Cycle of Codependence and Addiction for the Next Generation* (Nampo, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assoc., 1993), 19. In Johnnie Lorren, *Domestic Violence in OUR Church?: A Thirteen Week Guide to Heal Our Families*, Come and Reason Ministries, accessed January 11, 2020, [https://comeandreason.com/files/LTF\\_StudyGuides/LoveTruthFreedom\\_StudyGuide\\_DomesticViolence.pdf](https://comeandreason.com/files/LTF_StudyGuides/LoveTruthFreedom_StudyGuide_DomesticViolence.pdf), 68.

7. Lorren, *Domestic Violence in Our Church?*, 68, author’s emphasis.

8. Ezekiel 18:2b, KJV.

experts in psychology suggest that *hurt people hurt people*, and abused people, whether consciously or unconsciously, are attracted to abusers. I attribute such behavioral lifestyle to the fact that *dysfunctional addicts* are attracted to those individuals who come from households of dysfunction.

Lorren poses challenging questions that I and other church leaders must ponder and respond to. I asked myself, am I/are we selfish with the Christ in us especially where responding to the issue of domestic violence and abuse within my congregation is concerned? Ministry or business as usual, with a good scripture, prayer, and waiting for *Jesus to work it out* is a paradigm which we must revisit. The ability and boldness to approach the issue of domestic violence with new models and fresh ideas must be done. It is my hope and goal as a result of taking on and accepting a new challenge within my congregation that there will be a paradigm shift towards holistic ministry in words and deeds for all concerned.

Salvation of others is something which must be of utmost importance within my congregational setting. Stepping outside one's set of norms challenges church leaders to be sensitive to the needs of others while at the same time having the courage to confront the presenting issues. As church leaders, we should also be aware of our own "stuff", to include our cultural and/or church biases and limitations, when it comes to dealing with domestic abuse. Semiotic meanings, which includes being alert to "images and signs", may often be overlooked concerning domestic violence especially in the church because signs of abuse are normally not expected to show up in the church.

There is comfort in talking about the goodness of God in my relationship with others whom I believe are spiritually matured, but what about the ones who are hurting in silence, and I/we do nothing although signs and images of abuse when they are present? Do I ask God to help

me hear the voice of others that I, by my own strength, cannot hear? Are there signs that certain members within the congregation are crying out but their cries are drowned out or ignored with my praise and worship activity? When members of our congregations and communities have been wounded there will be signs and images, and church leaders cannot be so addicted to *having church* that we miss the opportunity to *be the church* providing practical yet healing guidance. The Prophet Isaiah declares, “Yes, truth is gone, and anyone who renounces evil is attacked. The LORD looked and was displeased to find there was no justice. He was amazed to see that no one intervened to help the oppressed. So, he himself stepped in to save them with his strong arm, and his justice sustained him.”<sup>9</sup> The Lord steps in using people as his extended arms to see, hear and assist the overlooked, the marginalized and the abused.

In their book, *Religion and intimate partner violence: understanding the challenges and proposing solutions* by Nancy Nason-Clark, Barbara Fisher-Townsend, Catherine Holtmann, Stephen McMullin they state,

Women who are victims of abuse have hope that the violence in their relationships will end and they and their children can live peacefully in the family unit. Often, they hope for reconciliation with their partner as well. Sometimes religious women are unrealistic in the hope that their abusive partners will change or that they themselves have faith and ability to help their husbands change. Sacred texts are filled with passages encouraging those who live in times of pain and darkness not to give up hope in their journey toward joy and light. Religious women need assistance in recognizing behavior associated with cycles of abuse and understanding they are not responsible for the actions of their abusers. They need to understand that men who act violently, for whatever reason, need professional help in order to change and that their role is to do whatever needs to be done in order to ensure their own safety. When this becomes clear to victims, then religious women’s hope can be directed toward their own journey of physical, emotional, and spiritual healing. Learning to access the available help and support for victims of domestic violence from both sacred and secular sources can help foster the realistic hope women require to assist them on their healing journey.<sup>10</sup>

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9. Isaiah 59:15-16, NKJV.

10. Nason-Clark, Nancy, Barbara Fisher-Townsend, Catherine Holtmann, and Stephen McMullin. *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: Understanding the Challenges and Proposing Solutions*. Interpersonal Violence Series. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018. 11.

Additionally, according to Lorren, relationships, whether married or single, do not come prepackaged for perfection.<sup>11</sup> I often hear men and women alike make the statement, “I don’t want to be in a relationship with someone who has *baggage*.” I wonder if such a person exists, one who is baggage-free. This concept always gives me the visual of traveling with baggage, the ease of mobility is all in how much you pack and plan to carry with you on the trip. I will not belabor the point but, what I will say is from the time we are born until we go to our graves, we will have life issues, we will have baggage. What really matters is how we carry the baggage in our life. Sometimes, we just need to know how to “pack” light. At this point I submit an additional excerpt from Lorren which he subtitles “Human but Teachable”,

It’s not the occasional deed or misdeed that determines the direction of our lives. The same holds true of abuse. Abuse is a pattern of behavior, not the occasional act for which we turn immediately to God and say, “I don’t want to be like this. Please change me as You see fit. I can’t do it alone.”

During the process of change, there may be a need to ask forgiveness of others affected by our actions. Through these instances, earthly friends and family can eventually learn to know each of us as a loving, non-abusive entity in their lives. If forgiveness is never sought and change never comes, true abuse may well be present.

Consider this insightful quote; “People bring all of their debits and liabilities incurred in childhood into their adult relationships and impose them on their mates and children, and the children pass them along to the next generation.... It is possible to be a committed Christian and still be dysfunctional (unable to function as God intended).... Becoming a Christian does not negate the law of cause and effect. If a child is wounded, he or she will bear the scars” (*Never Good Enough*, Carol Cannon, p. 19).<sup>12</sup>

Catherine Kroeger in her book, *Women, abuse, and the Bible: how scripture can be used to hurt or to heal*, has identified certain religious beliefs that she believes, as they interact with

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11. Lorren, *Domestic Violence in Our Church?*, 69.

12. Lorren, *Domestic Violence in Our Church?*, 69.

other factors create an environment where abuse may occur and where it is less likely that a woman will effectively defend themselves and their children. The four religious implications are,

1. God intends that men dominate, and women submit.
2. Woman is morally inferior to man and cannot trust her own judgement
3. Suffering is a Christian virtue and women in particular have been designated to be “Suffering Servants”.
4. Christians must quickly forgive and be reconciled with those who sinned against them.

Any religious teaching that isn’t good news for even the most vulnerable among us is a distortion of Jesus’ gospel. Teachings that cause women to doubt their own intrinsic preciousness and equal worth with men, that cause them to mistrust their own ability to make moral judgment, or that makes them vulnerable to violence and abuse even within their most intimate relationships and homes are surely a blasphemous misrepresentation of Jesus’ intention for us. Teachings that cause both women and men to mistrust and despise femininity damage and diminish all of us.<sup>13</sup>

As pastors and church leaders we must be committed to prayer and training in order to join the fight against domestic violence. As stated previously in this thesis-project, families and individuals alike operate on established norms, be it toxic or non-toxic, and it is those norms which breeds life or toxicity into relationships. There are exceptions to this rule because there are individuals who come from abusive homes and past relationships who are not abusers. Does this mean those individuals are not scarred? No. But the difference is that they, by the power of God, are in an ongoing process of healing. One’s ability to ask for forgiveness for past abuses will be met with internal resistance without the power of God operating in them. James says the “unruly evil” member in me, my tongue, does not easily submit to doing such a thing, *and*, the Apostle Paul writes, I know that “nothing good dwells in me.... I have a desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out” unless the power of God is allowed to guide me in the process.<sup>14</sup>

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13. Kroeger, Catherine Clark, and James R Beck. *Women, Abuse, and the Bible: How Scripture Can Be Used to Hurt or to Heal*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996. 16-27.

14. James 3:8, KJV; Romans 8:18, ESV.



We must remember that change is a process and realize that we may not see immediate results, in fact things may get worse before they get better. In the process of healing, God does not operate as a puppet master where we dance to some divine beat. It is our submission to God in preparation to the ministering process, and the abuser and abused submission to God in the healing process. Remaining teachable as pastor and church leaders is an attitude we must not rebel against. I do not profess to know it all and should not pretend that I do. Lessons for me in the ministering process may come from the most unlikely sources so my advice to all pastors and church leaders is to have a listening ear, keep an open mind and heart for the good of the people and the advancement of the kingdom of God.

John Maxwell's book *Developing the Leader Within You* lists ten key areas which will add to one's skill as a leader, and they are: Influence, Priorities, Integrity, Creating Positive Change, Problem-Solving, Attitude, People, Vision, Self-Discipline, and Staff Development.<sup>15</sup> Although all are important, I will not attempt to conduct a book review nor address all ten topics. But I would like to address three of them, Influence, Integrity, and Vision. But first, Maxwell, in the introduction of this book, shares a telling story,

Leonard Ravenhill in "The Last Days Newsletter" tells about a group of tourists who were visiting a picturesque village. As they walked by an old man sitting beside a fence, one tourist asked in a patronizing way, "were there any great men born in this village?" The old man replied, "Nope, only babies."

Leadership is developed, not discovered. The truly "born leader" will always emerge; but, to stay on top, natural leadership characteristics must be developed. In working with thousands of people desirous of becoming leaders, I have discovered they all fit in one of four categories or levels of leadership,

The Leading Leader:

- Is born with leadership qualities.
- Has seen leadership modeled throughout life.
- Has learned added leadership through training.
- Has self-discipline to become a great leader

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15. John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), ix-x.

The Learned Leaders:

- Has seen leadership modeled most of life
- Has learned leadership through training
- Has self-discipline to be a great leader

The Latent Leader:

- Has just recently seen leadership modeled
- Is learning to be a leader through training.
- Has self-discipline to become a good leader

The Limited Leader:

- Has little or no exposure to leaders.
- Has little or no exposure to leadership training.
- Has desire to become a leader.<sup>16</sup>

I am convinced a fallacy exists which suggests that the ability to lead others is somehow automatic once placed in or elected to a position of authority. John Maxwell is a renowned expert in the area of leadership, and many have benefitted from his seminars, me included.

The ability to combat domestic violence effectively within our congregations requires extensive, ongoing leadership training. Maxwell informs us with four categories of leaders; Leading, Learned, Latent, and Limited. Somewhere along the continuum of leadership development, pastors and other members of leadership teams within our congregations must first accept where we currently stand, and then determine what the next steps in the development process are. Next, the effective development process will contain a strategic plan of action, accountability along with an Individual Development Plan (IDP), and follow-up. With tools such as these given by John Maxwell and others, excuses for being unprepared or ill-prepared are unacceptable.

Regardless the size of one's congregation we cannot slack on leadership development. In searching out a biblical model I turn to Jesus himself as an example. Without digging into and discussing extensive aspects of the historical Jesus, what I want to suggest at this point is, Jesus

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16. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, ix.

trained in the Temple from childhood up to adulthood and turned the world upside down during his recorded ministry according to Holy Scriptures. His leadership skills to lead and train the twelve disciples, who led others and contributed to growing the church exponentially, were unparalleled.

The way to lead our congregations along with challenges we will encounter, is no small task and not for the fainthearted. It is necessary to my church's forward progress towards eradicating domestic violence within our congregation, to take honest inventory of our leadership teams, assess what is next in the process, and then move forward. Continuing with a focus on leadership and holistic ministry when confronting domestic violence, Burns, Chapman and Guthrie co-authored a book entitled *Resilient Ministry*. Although the entire writing is meaningful, I will focus my attention on portions of chapter two, "The Five Themes of Resilient Ministry" which are; Spiritual Formation, Self-Care, Emotional and Cultural Intelligence, Marriage and Family, and Leadership and Management.<sup>17</sup> What was especially interesting to me was how the authors stated that on at least an annual basis we all should take time to conduct various check-ups like our annual physical. Also, Burns, Chapman and Guthrie contend that too many annual reviews done for a pastor deal with superficial concerns and do not "probe the real issues that tear down or build up pastoral resilience."<sup>18</sup> Working full-time or part-time in ministry has the propensity to drain us of our physical strength, emotional wellbeing, and spiritual endurance. An occupational hazard of ministry is spending so much time preparing to present, preach, and teach to others to encourage their spiritual growth that we forget to protect

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17. Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2013), 18-29.

18. Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 18.

our own spiritual health and well-being. Our devotional and prayer life is lacking resulting in spiritual emaciation.

Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie state spiritual formation is primarily “the process of maturing.”<sup>19</sup> Using this definition as a launching pad to address spiritual formation, pastors and other church leaders must understand that maturing as leaders to address congregational issues resulting from domestic violence does not happen overnight. Paul encouraged Timothy, “Train yourself for godliness.... Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching.”<sup>20</sup> I am convinced that the ability to *keep an eye* on others is not too difficult but keeping an eye on myself requires insight and honesty which needs to come from a source greater than myself, and in this case, that source is God.

As previously stated in this thesis-project, ministering to domestic violence abusers and the abused is not for the faint of heart, because many abusers and abused are those close to us or sometimes serving in positions of leadership and authority. Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie share a story of one pastor who was asked by one of his deacons, “How are you doing?” The simple question challenged the pastor either to be brutally honest or superficial. Listen to the internal dialogue that pastor had with himself,

When asked the question, Bob [the pastor] faced an ethical dilemma. He wasn’t doing well at all. He was frustrated with the people in the church and was frustrated with his frustration. He was questioning his capacity as a leader and his own spiritual maturity. In a split second, he pondered the options; *If I answer honestly, how would this man handle my response? Would he continue to follow me? Or would he throw up his hands and say, “you’re no spiritual leader! I’m out of here!” Do I tell the truth, or do I give him a superficial answer?* Bob decided to go superficial and lied. He said he was fine and then diverted the conversation.<sup>21</sup>

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19. Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 18.

20. 1 Timothy 4:7, 16, ESV.

21. Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 18.

When faced with a similar scenario, it is important, especially to me as assistant pastor along with church leaders, to be honest. Although to do so places us in a vulnerable position, the ability to do it, being completely honest, is needed. Why is it that some church leaders choose not to be honest about *how we are* or *how we are really feeling*? I suggest that it is a matter of pride or the expectation of people. Also, anxiety has a way of holding me and others hostage to our own thoughts because as leaders we don't want to be labeled as weak and ill-prepared to handle presenting problems such as domestic violence. Once pastors and church leaders come to grips with the fact that ministry requires them to lead and manage, they must learn to confront and deal with the expectations embedded in these tasks. Expectations and demands for service are at an all-time high. Resources and time constraints constantly push against congregants' expectations. Disappointing people is a hard reality to face.

Harvard professors Ronald Heifetz and Mary Linsky in their book *Leadership on the Line* summarize, "Exercising leadership might be understood as disappointing people at a rate they can absorb."<sup>22</sup> What a powerful statement by professors Heifetz and Linsky! Exercising elements which contribute to resilient ministry are crucial in confronting domestic violence within our congregations. Navigating through rough areas in order to get our point(s) across demands that we stay in the fight to the very end while "*disappointing people at a rate they can absorb.*"

Additionally, good management of human capital sometimes dictates that pastor and church leaders draw a *line in the sand* and refer certain cases of domestic abuse to civil authorities. I believe that everything churches need in order to meet the needs of congregants

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22. Ronald Heifetz and Mary Linsky, *Leadership on The Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Change* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017), 142.

exists within the congregation, and I believe that includes having the fortitude and strength to contact the proper authorities when necessary. Pastors and church leaders must be humble enough to recognize the point where our skills are at their peak and time dictates that we refer and move on which also includes follow-up. Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie further comment the following from information gathered at a Pastors' Summit, and with respect to evaluating one's spiritual formation,

I've seen patterns of anxiety and faithlessness through my reflection time. I've realized that my sleeplessness is anxiety. My devotional life is bad because I believe I have to take life by the horns. All of this reveals my lack of belief. I believe God is holding out on me.

What happens when I skirt my spiritual growth? I replace it with the "spiritual" tasks of pastoral life. So, for example, it is not unusual to find me substituting sermon preparation for personal worship and Bible study. "After all, I rationalize, I will be meditating on the Bible." However, the sustained exchange of ministry duties for spiritual growth results in my becoming an "inch deep." The outcome is a spiritually dry, worn-out pastor with very little "left in the tank" for others. The "spring of water welling up to eternal life" in John 4:14 has slowed to a trickle.<sup>23</sup>

How telling are these comments made by church pastors in attendance at the Pastors' Summit? If we are honest, I am confident that we will find ourselves as one who can attest to the same scenarios as presented. Passing off busy work as spiritual development and formation is rather easy to do. Besides, as did the pastor in the above quote, I too rationalize for my shortcomings because I can always justify my actions as I am doing "church" work. Pastors and church leaders alike must make time and attend to our spiritual maturity and growth development.

Marva J. Dawn's book *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting*, suggests that all of us kingdom workers – pastors, church leaders – cannot afford to

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23. Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 33.

shortchange the Sabbath aspect of our daily lives as Christians.<sup>24</sup> It should not matter if my Sabbath differs from others in both form and function, day(s) of the week and other elements necessary for my Sabbath sanity, what matters is that I wisely take and honor the Sabbath.

In order to get the best benefit of one's "Sabbath", pastors and church leaders must take seriously the need to have time with self and God. As a result of making a commitment to honor MY sabbath, I as well as other church leaders must ask ourselves; what must I *Cease* from? What or in whom must I seek *Rest*? What must I *Embrace*? How should I *Feast* or celebrate? These questions are those which I must ponder and act upon. We do not need to seek guidance from others on fulfilling commitments to our Sabbath.

It is during my Sabbath, if at no other time, where I meet God at the throne of grace, where I make myself vulnerable and take a chance to rest in God with confidence, where I speak to God from the heart knowing that it is only in God where my strength is, and to be refreshed with the oil of the Holy Spirit. All of this is necessary because when I return from Sabbath *ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting*, reality awaits and needs to be dealt with appropriately. In fact, my next case relating to domestic violence just may involve making tough decisions which may have negative consequences even for some of my most faithful members or leaders.

There will be times when pastors and church leaders must defer a session and contact authorities to curb further violence. At such times there must not be an internal struggle to identify whom I must trust and follow at that moment. There exists a plethora of authors and individuals who have something to say about ministering to victims of domestic violence, but the one whom pastors and church leaders must be "of" is Christ and Christ alone.

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24. Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 119.

Jared E. Alcantara in his book *Crossover Preaching*, and in conversation with Gardner C. Taylor, offers a telling slant to sermon preparation and delivery. Chapter two, entitled “Turning Ink to Blood,” Taylor discusses with Alcantara what he refers to as *Performative Improvisation* during preaching. Amy Seham commented in Chapter 5 “Putting Flesh to Bones” of Alcantara’s book what improvisation accomplishes is the ability to “create space” within the sermon leaving ample space which affords the speaker the opportunity to skillfully improvise depending on the time, space, and listeners.” Additionally, this writing contains a quote by Jacques Copeau which states, “Improvisation is an art that has to be learned.”<sup>25</sup>

I contend that the preacher’s ability to address domestic violence skillfully while preaching is no simple task. Why do I believe improvisation is critical? It is critical because some pastors may not be comfortable with confronting the issue head-on, therefore, I must commit to giving intelligent attention to God’s word and prayer during sermon preparation. “Turning Ink to Blood” is not a green light to become reckless when given opportunity to preach. In fact, Gardner Taylor, in Alcantara’s writing suggests the following,

Sometimes the best thing to do with a sermon is to “plow as straight a furrow as you can, finish, and leave the rest to God.”... [Because] improvisation is “the spontaneous response to the unfolding of an unexpected situation; the ingenuity called on to deal with the situation” [which in this immediate thesis-project case is my “voice crying in the wilderness” (John 1:23, KJV)].<sup>26</sup>

The pulpit from which I preach is not one where associate pastors, ministers, and other church leaders have freedom to speak arbitrarily on the issue of domestic violence within the congregational setting. As Alcantara states, there are times when all one can do is “plow”

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25. Jared E. Alcantara, *Crossover Preaching: Intercultural – Improvisational Homiletics in Conversation*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 95-138.

26. Jared E. Alcantara, *Crossover Preaching: Intercultural – Improvisational Homiletics in Conversation*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 95-138.



straight through and sit down. My ability to address and confront domestic violence during preaching must stay within established constraints, and I trust God to honor any improvisational “space” created, or as Amy Seham states, “inventiveness within limitations.”<sup>27</sup> As serious as domestic abuse is, it amazes me that some churches, to include the one in which I serve, steer away from it and there are devastating effects as a result. To further explore *Crossover Preaching*, I offer the following additional excerpt,

Sustained practice [of performative improvisation] over time leads to a level of performative excellence that cognitive and behavioral theorists refer to as “automaticity,” or higher-level actions and behaviors performed instinctively.... It is not so much a gift that descends from heaven as it is a performative skill.... [It is] an exercise in controlled spontaneity...born within restraints and limits, [and] structure ignites spontaneity [and] keeps it from wandering off course.... It is okay to break the rules of preaching so long as one is experienced enough to know what he or she is doing.... New Testament writers indicate that preaching is indeed a divine gift, they do not imply that spiritual gifts come to God’s people fully formed and completely fashioned.<sup>28</sup>

Considering the previous quote, confronting domestic violence from the pulpit whether during Sunday morning worship or weekly bible study sessions is possible and the critical question which resounds is, how and when?

My role as assistant pastor along with other church leaders must endure the challenge of adequate preparation which will involve biblical knowledge as well as non-biblical material. In order to articulate and confront domestic abuse effectively within my congregational setting does not demand that my sermon and bible study topics be overtly entitled “Domestic Violence in My Church.” Our voices *crying in the wilderness* can utilize improvisational skills to get the point across effectively.

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27. Amy Seham, *Whose Improv Is It Anyway? Beyond Second City* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 72.

28. Alcantara, *Crossover Preaching*, 96.

Additionally, congregational competency is key to getting one's point(s) across in a manner which cuts to the core while at the same time provide Gilead's balm. Pastors and church leaders cannot be anxious when confronting domestic violence. It is to be remembered that abusers and the abused suffer from what I believe is strong demonic influence which can only be cast away by the word of God, prayer, and in some cases fasting. Informed by Alcantara's writing, the skills necessary to confront abusers and the abused do not come prepackaged and fully formed. Further exploration of material contained in Alcantara also covered the issue of intercultural competency in a section entitled "Transgressing the Divide."<sup>29</sup>

On any given day within congregational gatherings for whatever the occasion might be, pastors and church leaders cannot predict who shows up to participate in the worship experience nor what is on their minds, as demonstrated in the following excerpt,

A popular Chinese fable begins with two men walking along the river. One says to the other, "Look how happy the fish are as they swim in the river!" The other responds, "You are not a fish. How do you know whether the fish are happy?" The man answered back, "Ah! But you are not me! How do you know whether I know what the fish think?" Fables like these reveal one of the many blind spots in human rationality, the tendency to make false assumptions about others, what they think or feel.<sup>30</sup>

How telling is this excerpt! Intercultural competency as defined by Alcantara is "to possess the knowledge, skills, and habits required for negotiating difference effectively."<sup>31</sup> The congregational setting in which I serve, although primarily African American, consists of various races, creeds, colors, and national origins. The various congregants' (or parishioners') backgrounds are not to be assumed or taken for granted. Pastors and congregational leaders must not operate in the habit of *knowing what the people are thinking – mind-reading*.

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29. Alcantara, *Crossover Preaching*, 191-236.

30. Alcantara, *Crossover Preaching*, 191.

31. Alcantara, *Crossover Preaching*, 192.

There is no way, that I am aware of, that one can be empowered with such divine insight. This is not to suggest that God at any time is unable to empower one to receive and articulate divine revelation for congregations. Being irrational has no place in addressing and confronting domestic violence within congregations. I do not know what the “fish” [congregation] are thinking when I stand to preach and teach. Total reliance on God’s powers must have the preeminence and it is only then that human abilities acquired through preparation and practice can emerge.

Discussed earlier in Chapter One was the conclusion that those individuals who abuse as well as the abused are *weak and without strength* to help themselves, and we, who are strong, are charged to bear with their *weakness of mind and spirit*. Sometimes this may include pastors and church leaders who make assumptions about how the “fish” are thinking. A potential serious pitfall in leaders is to fall into the trap of thinking the congregation – weekly listeners present at worship service are happy, based on the call-and-response activity while we are *having church*.

Brenda Branson and Paula J. Silva in their joint writing entitled *Violence Among Us* state, “Statistics show that one in every four women in each church community is being abused by her partner or has been abused at some time in the past.”<sup>32</sup> Using their statistical reporting to make my point, of the ~7,900 membership roster at the church where I currently serve, women make up 54% of members. Using the assumption that “one in four women” has been or are currently being abused, this translates to approximately 1,706 women at my church. These statistics are mind-blowing for me and totally unacceptable for my congregation. One case of partner or family violence is too much. Brenda Branson and Paula J. Silva further contend, “The challenge

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32. Brenda Branson and Paula J. Silva, *Violence Among Us: Ministry to Families in Crisis* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2007), xv.

for every pastor or counselor is to go beyond a casual awareness of the problem to the harsh reality of this epidemic, to move past apathy to conviction, and turn empathy into compelling action. As spiritual leaders and Christ-followers, your mandate from God is to come alongside hurting people and join the battle for their hearts and souls.”<sup>33</sup>

As Jesus said to Simon the disciple, “Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat.”<sup>34</sup> In brief context, the Luke account expresses Jesus’ divine insight regarding Simon’s continued, positive future as a disciple of Christ. Satan’s “sifting” would entail mental confusion ultimately resulting in turning away as a disciple of Christ. Jesus’ immediate response to Satan’s demonic plan was, “But I have prayed for you that your faith fails not, and when you are converted, strengthen thy brother.”<sup>35</sup> Considering the previous quote, and Luke 22:31-32, while taking bold yet calculated steps, I am reminded of the words of Branson and Silvia to move “beyond casual awareness...to compelling action” in the battle against domestic violence, the abuser and the abused souls must become priority.<sup>36</sup>

Domestic violence in one-on-one relationships as well as within families must be approached as a new frontier of sorts even though abuse is nothing new to church. My trust in Jesus as helper and sustainer of my faith is that which I must rely on without fail. The same way Jesus’ promise to Simon that his faith would not fail is the same confidence I, as well as my church leaders, must have. It is also the latter part of verse 32 wherein lies a major challenge to pastors and church leaders which is, when we are converted to the worship, wisdom,

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33. Branson and Silva, *Violence Among Us*, xv.

34. Luke 22:31, KJV.

35. Luke 22:32 KJV.

36. Branson and Silva, *Violence Among Us*, xv.

righteousness, love and obedience of God it is then and only then that we can “strengthen” abusers and the abused.

This ministry challenge for pastors and leaders suggests that we must commit ourselves to prayer, fasting, study, and then action. Any action plan implemented must not be ill prepared through irrational trial and error. While it is true that Jesus’ disciples were not fully formed in the ways of Christianity when they met him, over time they demonstrated love for him through action. What disciples demonstrated then was not perfect, per se, but results from much of their preaching and teaching indicated reliance on the power of the Christ.

Many individuals within our congregations and communities are ashamed to admit they are having problems at home and in relationships, but it is a grave error to judge congregations on their *worship service faces*. The reality is, when we feel it’s necessary, we all wear *the mask* well. According to [domesticviolencestatistics.org](https://domesticviolencestatistics.org/), “Every 9 seconds in the United States a woman is assaulted or beaten,” and, “Every day in the United States, more than three women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends.”<sup>37</sup> There is a myth which operates on the assumption that domestic abuse primarily occurs in the inner city and among the poor. Branson and Silva contend that pastors and church leaders “must ask God to give them the compassion of Christ to move beyond good intentions to love in action.”<sup>38</sup>

As I press on in this thesis-project, I find it to be relatively simple at times to put words to paper, but the real test for me as assistant pastor is to do something about the problem of domestic abuse within my congregation. To do so involves much more than writing a paper, having conversations, and developing strategic plans, all of which are necessary. I want to do

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37. Domestic Violence Statistics, accessed January 11, 2020, <https://domesticviolencestatistics.org/domestic-violence-statistics/>.

38. Branson and Silva, *Violence Among Us*, 8.

something, I *must* do something to effect change, and while the good in me wants to do good, the reality is the forces surrounding me cause me not to. Those forces include other senior leaders and my reluctance at times to *walk on the water to Jesus* without sinking!

I admit my fears, and as I continue turning “blood to ink and ink to blood,” even in this thesis-project I find myself energized to begin making strides towards strengthening my sisters and brothers as a result of my ongoing conversion as I emerge in this research. Understanding that domestic violence is a learned behavior which can be unlearned, I am confident in the power of God’s word that a vehicle for change lies in my hand to do my part in the vineyard where I have been assigned to cultivate. A demonic force associated with pretense and hiding in plain sight in our congregation must be confronted and broken. Additionally, I believe that when abuse has gripped individuals and families for so long that living in abusive environments is normalized, it is constantly evolving as their *new normal*. Branson and Silva also state, “Emotional battering...runs the gamut from a steady grinding down of a woman [and man] to emotional trauma.”<sup>39</sup> A painful reality is, “while [their] bones are never broken, [their] flesh never bruised, [their] blood never spilled, [they] nonetheless [are] wounded.”<sup>40</sup>

At this time, I can say the type of abuse does not matter, abuse is abuse and will not be tolerated or selectively ignored within my congregation. The research and knowledge I have gained through this thesis-project has called me to a higher level of accountability, to deal with my own demons of the past and present and now I must respond decisively by educating and training others to do the same. With that being said, I humbly pray God’s divine power saturate

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39. Branson and Silva, *Violence Among Us*, 8.

40. Mary Susan Wilson, *No Visible Wounds: Identifying Nonphysical Abuse of Women* (New York: Random House, 1995), 32.

me with wisdom, knowledge, and revelatory insight to confront domestic violence within my congregation and the community.

Branson and Silva state,

The person who has suffered at the hands of an abuser, particularly over any length of time, may have been wounded before the current abusive relationship began. Therefore, the latest experience with abuse will spark, or feed the smoldering flames of the victim's negative view of self, of the opposite sex in general, and even of God. Look beneath the surface of [victims] who have been battered (verbally, emotionally, or physically) and you will find a wounded [creation of God] whose perception of the world and its Creator may be painfully distorted. [He or she] may express those views with anger, despair, confusion, or doubt.<sup>41</sup>

It is to be expected by pastor and church leaders that efforts to curb and eradicate domestic violence within our congregation will be no easy task. Those individuals who are coming to us, or who are sitting in worship are wounded spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. In some sense, they are babies with respect to being ministered to about domestic violence while, at the same time, spiritually mature in other areas. Remember they are living their constantly evolving *new normal*. Furthermore, hatred for male figures and/or female figures along with a level of disgust concerning their relationship with God will not be a new phenomenon.

Those of us serving as pastors and church leaders must understand that what we are facing is demonic oppression at a high level. Therefore, we should exercise great skill and look beyond the surface to the source of their discontent. A biblical model which strengthens my case for this is the story where the Apostle Paul was preaching and teaching and one of his female followers constantly verbalized to others in the streets that this is Paul the great servant of the Lord, and it was Paul who turned to her and called out the devil.<sup>42</sup> Considering that event in biblical history, we must not think it strange when staunch followers of Christ in our

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41. Branson and Silva, *Violence Among Us*, 94.

42. Acts 16:17-18, KJV.

congregations are oppressed with demonic influence of various sorts, and in specific domestic violence cases violent and abusive spirits.

The devastating effects of domestic violence in homes as well as within our congregations must cease. Sunday morning pulpits, weekly bible study sessions, and small group meetings must engage conversation of abuse at all levels, being unafraid and unapologetic for our contribution to the conversations. As I previously stated, boldness to speak out is not a green light to undermining pastoral authority and respect. There exists much literature addressing the topic of domestic violence, and it is my goal to further investigate additional literature in order to gain an educated advantage which contributes to the overall and specific area(s) and conversations needed in confronting of domestic violence especially within the church.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### PROJECT DESIGN

#### **Project Overview**

The purpose of this thesis-project is to educate the researcher to discover the impact of domestic violence within my congregation, assess the knowledge base and comfort level of clergy and church leaders in dealing with domestic violence issues and provide training where needed. The researcher believes pastors and church leaders have good intentions; however, in the case of domestic violence, good intentions without the proper training and resources could have deadly consequences.

Participants in this study consisted of senior church pastors, clergy and other members of church leadership. The preferred process used in this thesis-project consisted of the following stages: The first stage was to think about the effects of and envision the propensity for destroyed family structures and individual lives resulting from domestic violence within the context of the ministry where the researcher currently serves. Stage two was to assess the local knowledge base and need for training using informal small group settings for dialogue and the collection of raw data using a survey questionnaire. In the third stage the following questions were posed; what does the Bible say about domestic violence? Why is the subject of domestic violence not addressed more during corporate congregational preaching and teaching sessions? In stage four the researcher conducted biblical research to identify scriptures, and other writings, both religious and secular, which were relevant to address domestic violence within the church. Also, in stage four, there was inquiry in order to better understand issues associated with, and

contributing to, the devastation which results from domestic violence, especially within the Christian context.

As such, the researcher was able to experience what various authors had to say about issues such as preaching, teaching, leadership, congregational care and the Christian faith, which then spring-boarded into relevant conversation with colleagues and other professionals who were also vested in these pastoral concerns. Much of the data collected assisted in the development of a “Plan of Action” which included training modules and other teaching and preaching resources for use in this researcher’s church and others in the local area.

### **The Participants**

What was discovered at the outset of this thesis-project was that information, training resources, and conversations regarding domestic violence within many local African American churches and congregational settings is almost non-existent. As a result of this deficiency, the approach to this thesis-project was first to think about current ministry context, the congregation and community served, read a wide variety of material associated with domestic violence, and create ways to begin, or add to, conversations relevant to domestic violence. Having lived and served in the current community of faith for over 23 years has contributed to developing healthy relationships with local pastors, other clergy and church leaders alike. As such, it was not difficult to have a general and informal conversations with a sampling of each group and hear their responses on issues associated with domestic violence within the church. Reflecting over the past 35 years in ministry, unfortunately, I cannot recall ever hearing sermons preached or a bible study taught concerning domestic violence. Usually, what I did hear focused on are the duties of a “good wife” and “children obeying their parents.”

Participants selected for this thesis-project were asked to respond to 27 questions by clicking on a link, which took them to “Survey Monkey,” an online survey instrument. All participants’ responses were anonymous. Selection prerequisites for participation in the survey were that all must be pastors, other clergy, a member of church leadership in an African American Baptist church, and within a 50-mile radius of my church located in Prince William County Virginia. This researcher added a disclaimer/warning that participants may stop taking the survey at any time if they began experiencing emotional distress and grief. In the event of such, a telephone number to a hotline for immediate support was provided in the survey instrument. A primary point of contact was provided to all participants of local counselors from the Center for Pastoral Counseling to provide immediate assistance if necessary.<sup>1</sup>

Informal conversations with pastors concerning domestic violence programs in their churches resulted in a self-assessment with the goal to hold each participant accountable to self, others, and God. Additionally, discovered and included in this thesis-project was the fact that exegeting scripture in both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament resulted in a great appreciation for biblical scholars who contribute to the exegetical processes. Any approaches to confronting domestic violence within the congregation, where the researcher serves as assistant pastor, must involve the other clergy in a collaborative effort and not be attempted as a solo journey. Some material gathered and discussed herein did not all directly address domestic violence but was relevant to the conversation on what we as leaders could do better to help our congregants. Areas within this thesis-project where Holy Scriptures are used afforded the ability to hermeneutically amplify said scriptures, going above and beyond written texts offering constant emerging fusions of horizons related to domestic violence and its devastating effects within the church.

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1. Center for Pastoral Counseling, accessed January 27, 2020, <http://pastoralcounseling.com/>.

An unfortunate consequence of this thesis-project approach was the fact that in having general conversations about domestic violence with local pastors, clergy, and church leaders, not much feedback was provided simply because the subject even in today's society is seen as taboo and uncomfortable. It became apparent to the researcher that no one wants to admit readily to the fact that domestic violence exists within the hallowed walls of their houses of worship, nor admit as pastors, clergy, and church leaders they are oftentimes ill equipped/trained to deal with issues of domestic violence properly.

The article in the *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, *When Violence Hits the Religious Home: Raising Awareness about Domestic Violence in Seminaries and amongst Religious Leaders*, in the section on Identifying the Challenges of Working in Seminaries states,

Our research at these seminaries demonstrates that such institutions present a number of challenges for teaching about domestic violence, while at the same time it highlights the importance of such teaching for seminary students who will soon find themselves responding to requests for help from religious victims. For a variety of practical and structural reasons, little is taught to most seminary students about domestic violence (McMullin & Nason-Clark, 2011). Although a recent study indicates that some seminaries may be more likely than in the past to include training about domestic violence as part of the curriculum (Cooper-White, 2004, 2011), we found that such courses are usually offered as electives and that most students - especially those in the Master of Divinity track that typically leads to pastoral ministry in a local congregation - do not include such courses in their program because they perceive that courses in disciplines such as theology and biblical studies are more highly valued in the seminary context for students preparing for pastoral ministry. Not until they approach graduation do students begin to realize their unpreparedness: in our survey, most first-year seminary students expressed confidence that before they graduate they would be well prepared to respond to the needs of a victim of domestic violence, but when surveyed during their final semester many students indicated that they were still either poorly prepared or not at all prepared to respond to the needs of such victims. When a seminary education omits or provides minimal training about domestic violence it not only leaves clergy unprepared, but it may also communicate to students that the issue is of little importance (Van Hightower and Gorton, 2002, p. 864).<sup>2</sup>

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2. Steve McMullin, Nancy Nason-Clark, Barbara Fisher-Townsend, and Cathy Holtmann. "When Violence Hits the Religious Home: Raising Awareness About Domestic Violence in Seminaries and Amongst Religious Leaders." *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 69, no. 2 (2015): 113–24. doi:10.1177/1542305015586776. 119.

This article confirmed the results of my clergy survey participants who stated that seminary did not prepare them to deal with domestic violence issues.

It appears that addressing domestic violence within African American congregations has been and continues to be a difficult conversation to have. With current movements such as “Me Too” the way is being paved for victims, especially women, not only to speak but also be heard to the point that decisive action is being taken towards the decrease in the occurrence of domestic violence. For instance, the researcher believes that as a direct result of current movements, speaking out against domestic violence and intimate partner violence, the sexual deviancy of abusers and violators such as Bill Cosby, Robert Kelly (R. Kelly), Harvey Weinstein, Matt Lauer, and Jefferey Epstein have been exposed and have received, or in the process of receiving punishment for their crimes.

Whereas consequences once consisted of being shunned, black-balled, and being forced out of jobs, today’s climate consists of emboldened victims speaking out and having legal representation giving credence to their claims, voices to their pain and suffering, and validating their worth, moving victims from shame to self-worth. Changing times in the world today encourages both men and women to speak out against the injustice that has been inflicted upon them because the reality of domestic assaults occurring in the world and within congregations is real! As such, policies and procedures are being implemented, courts are more empathetic, and more open conversations about domestic violence are prevalent and ongoing. Gone are the days for corporate executives having free reign to say and do the unspeakable, deviant predators within the church being ignored. Gone are the days when camouflaged cuts and bruises go unnoticed allowing the abused and broken to suffer publicly in silence, the abuser to hide in plain sight and assaults against family members to remain overlooked and unaddressed.

Although a goal of this researcher was to conduct raw data surveys which would also include direct interviews, discovered was the fact that pastoral conversations regarding domestic violence was limited to certain occasions which only occurred annually in October during Domestic Violence Awareness Month, if at all. Future goals of this researcher include capitalizing on knowledge gained, continuing to educate myself and others about domestic violence, creating platforms both written and spoken where discussions to confront the issue of domestic violence can happen, and developing and implementing next steps towards domestic violence education and eradication.

### Assessment

A pre-survey using the online survey instrument Survey Monkey was administered on November 16, 2019 to assess the current impact and knowledge base of select churches and their leaders' current capacity to confront and work towards eliminating domestic violence in African American congregations within a 50-mile radius of my church in Prince William County Virginia.

### Demographics

The demographic representations of the participants were gathered after results from Survey Monkey were compiled. Invitations were sent to 145 potential participants of which 99 (68%) were opened, 43 (29.7 %) were unopened, 72 (49.7%) clicked through, and 3 (2.1%) opted out. Ultimately 31 males and 31 females responded and completed the survey for a total of 62 respondents. The following tables are a sampling of the results of the survey. Complete pre-survey results can be found in Appendix A.

Table 1. Q1: Participant Gender

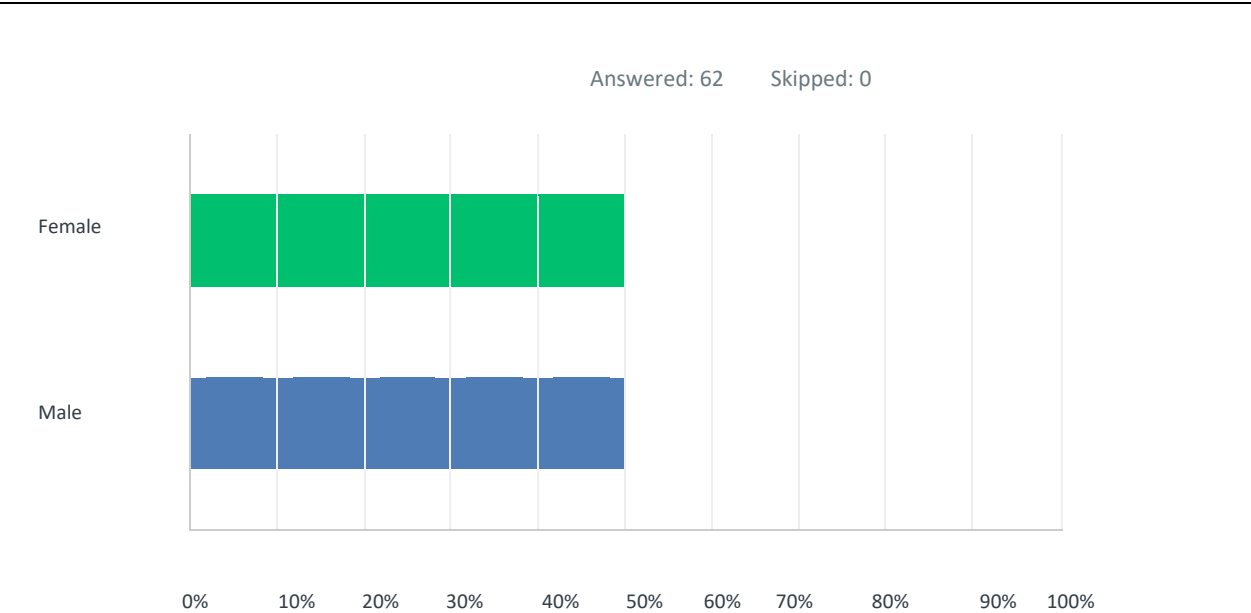


Table 2. Q2: Participant Age

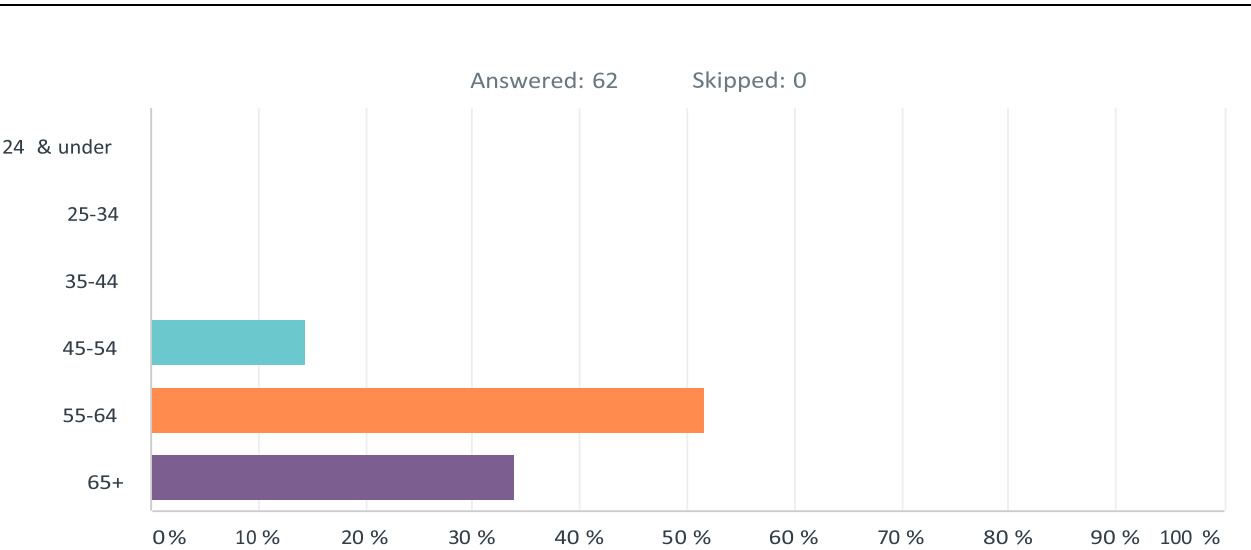


Table 3. Q3: Participant Ministry Title

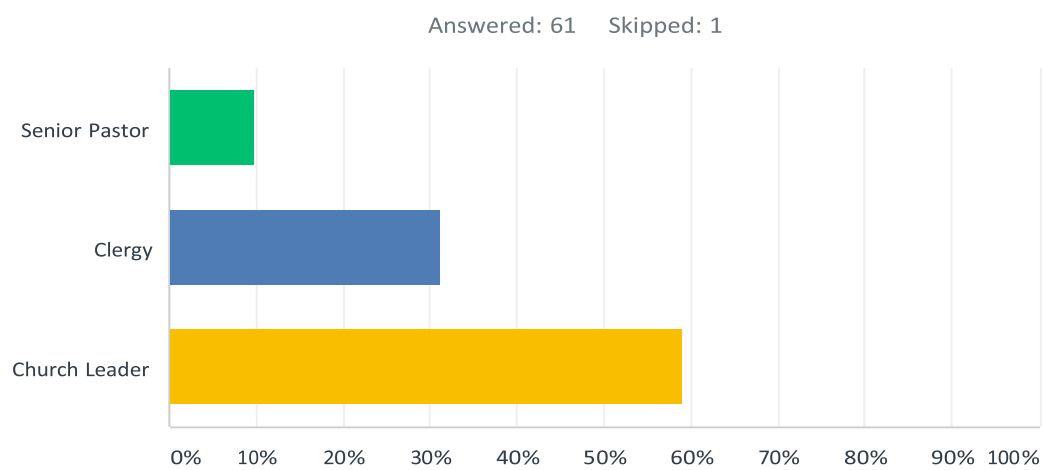
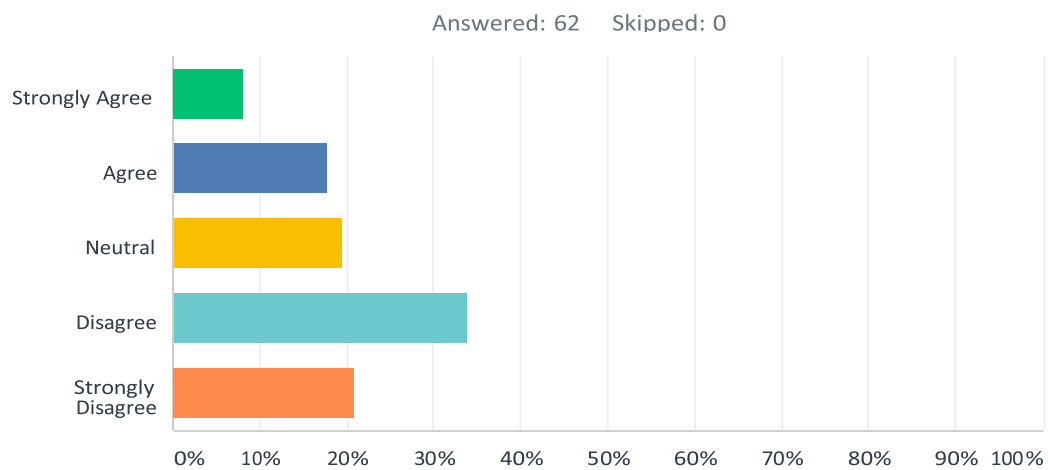


Table 4. Q8: “I Have addressed DV within my church”<sup>3</sup>



3. DV = Domestic Violence.



Table 5. Q13: “The leaders and ministerial staff of my church have received training on how to appropriately handle domestic violence issues.”

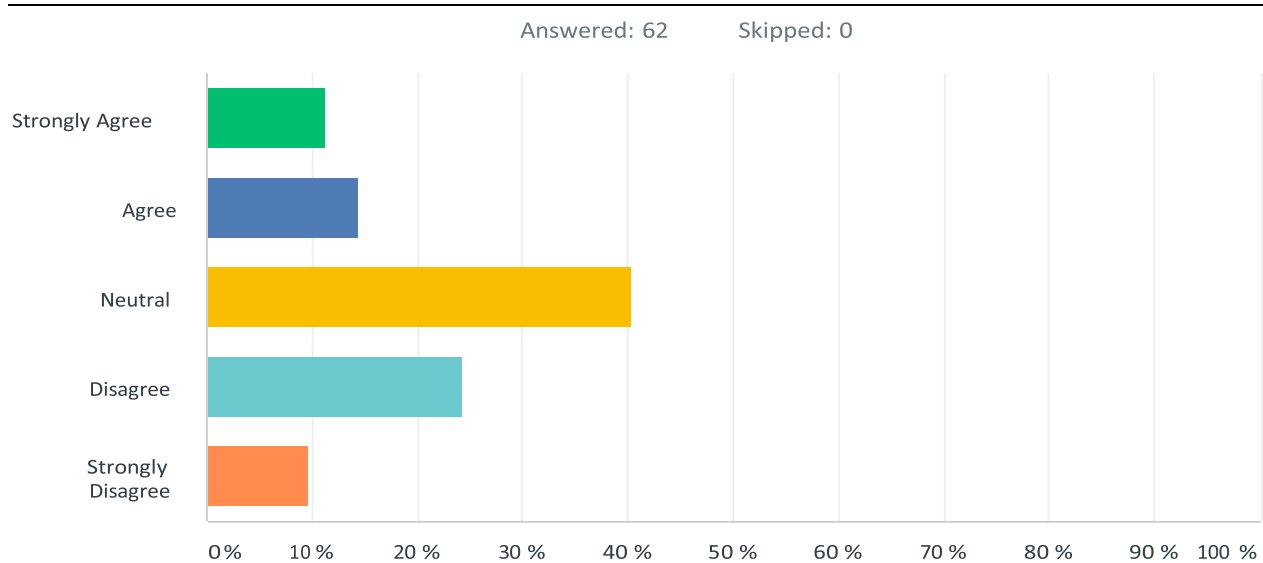


Table 6. Q16: “I know what resources are available to provide training to pastoral care staff . . . supporting and referring DV victims”

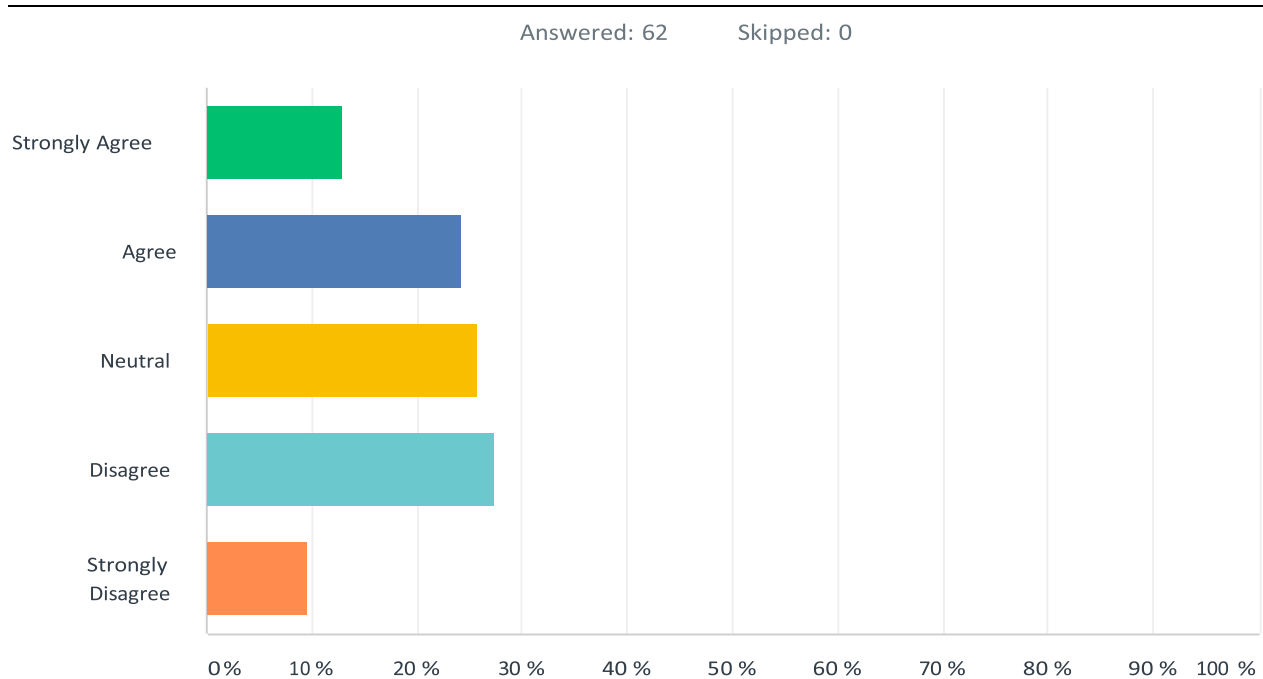


Table 7. Q24: “I need training on how to preach and teach on issues of domestic violence.”

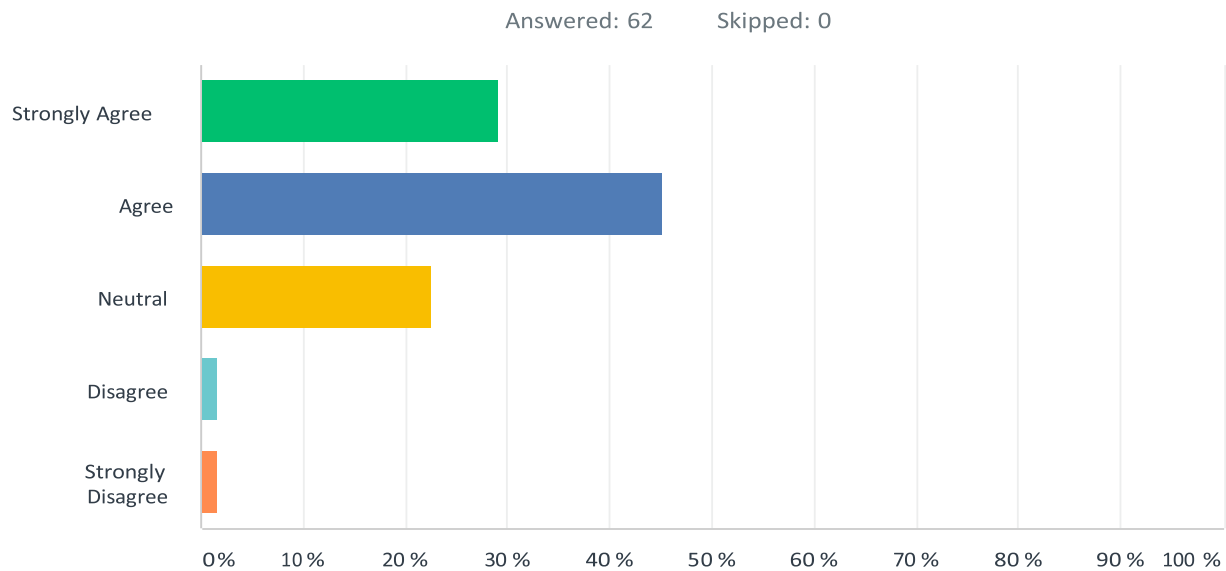


Table 8. Q25: “I need training in pastoral care and counseling concerning domestic violence.”

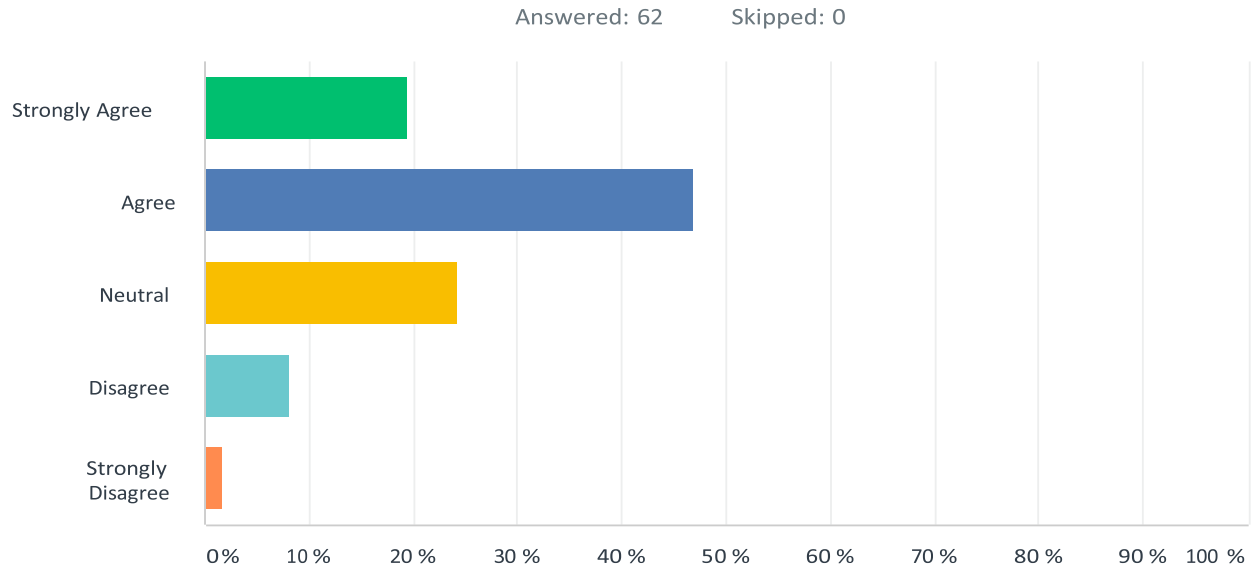
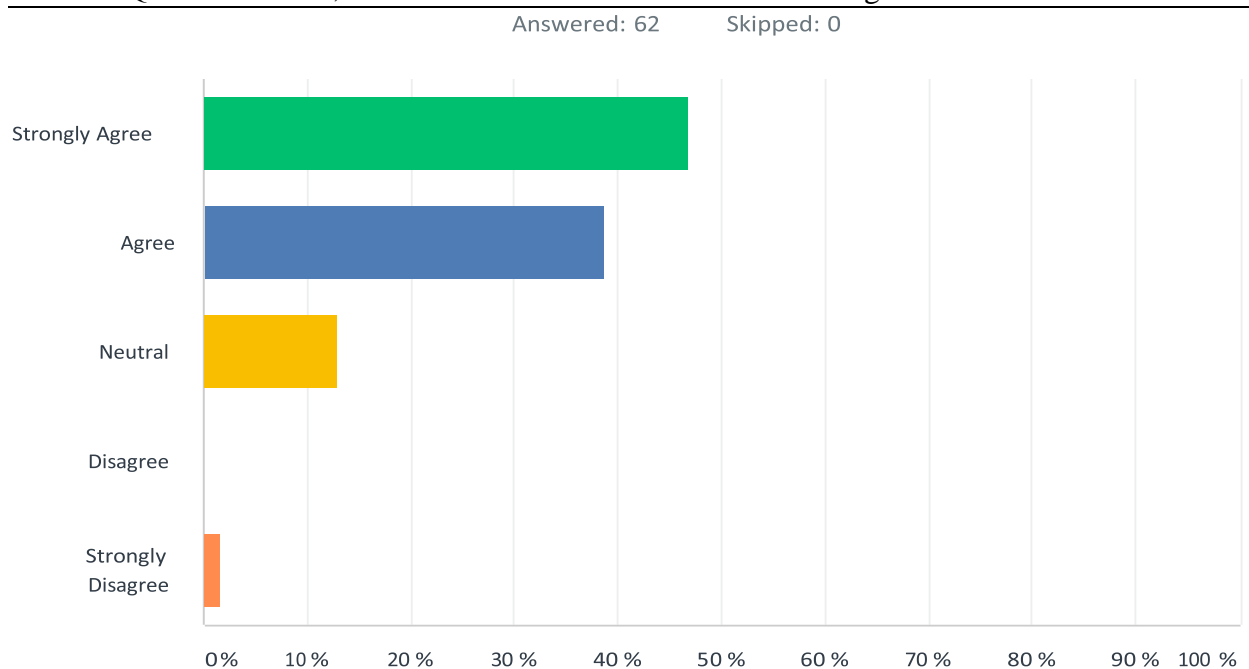


Table 9. Q26: “If offered, I would attend domestic violence training.”



To summarize the data, it is apparent that where the issue of domestic violence is concerned lots of work remains to be done. The majority respondents to the survey table 2. Q2 represented were in the age category 55-64 years old (51.61%). The next highest category represented were 65 years and older (33.87%), and the remainder of participants were 45-54 years old (14.52%). When surveys were initially sent out, the researcher did not purposely omit ages 44 and under. The next data set table 3. Q3, “Ministry Title” indicates that 9.84% respondents were Senior Pastors, 31.15% were clergy, and 59.02% served in a church leadership position, and one individual did not respond to this question. Question 8 in the survey, “I have addressed domestic violence within my church,” was telling with 33.87% of respondents answering “Disagree” while 20.97% “Strongly Disagree”, 17.74% Agree, and only 8.06% “Strongly Agree”. Next, table 5 indicates, of the 62 individuals surveyed, for the question “The leaders and ministerial staff of my church have received training on how to appropriately handle

domestic violence issues,” 40.32% respondents “Neutral”, 24.19% “Disagree”, 14.52% “Agree”, 11.29% “Strongly Agree”, and 9.68% “Strongly Disagree”. Question 16, represented in table 6, asked the question, “I know what resources are available within the community to provide training to my pastoral care staff with assisting, supporting and referring domestic violence victims.” To this question, 27.42% indicated “Disagree”, 25.81% “Neutral”, 24.19% “Agree”, 12.90% “Strongly Agree”, and 9.98% Strongly Disagree. As for table 7 where the question was, “I need training on how to preach and teach on issues of domestic violence,” 29.03% “Strongly Agree”, 45.16% “Agree”, 22.58% “Neutral”, 1.61% “Disagree”, and 1.6% “Strongly Disagree”. Finally, in table 8 representing question 25, “I need training in pastoral care and counseling concerning domestic violence,” 46.77% “Agree”, 24.19% “Neutral”, 19.35% “Strongly Agree”, 8.06% “Disagree”, and 1.61% “Strongly Disagree”.

Through informal discussions with pastors, church leaders and the survey results included in this thesis-project, what is clear is the need and the desire for training is the area of domestic violence. Research has shown that in most cases the response of the church has been nonexistence mostly because of the lack of knowledge and training. Most pastors and church leaders want to do the right thing; however, good intentions without the proper training may cause great harm. The results were clear that church pastors and leaders are not aware of the wealth of resources they have at their disposal literally in their back door to assist them in properly dealing with and confronting the issues of domestic violence in their congregations.

The survey results also reveal that most felt that seminary did not prepare them to deal with domestic violence as pastoral caregivers. Although the survey results are anonymous, it stirred the conscience of several participants prompting them to come forward to encourage the forward moving of the process and the positive anticipation for training. As a result of this

survey and research church leaders are challenged to not remain apathetic and comfortable being sideline spectators but to get in the game and become the salt and light to a dark and dying world of those who suffer from domestic violence on both sides, the abuser and the victim. When it comes to domestic violence, pastors must first be sensitive and aware to what is really going on in their congregations, acknowledge that there is a problem, seek training for them and their leaders to deal with the issue and then began to raise awareness with in their congregations.

As training resources, in Appendix C this researcher has included seven expository Bible Study Outlines. It is the word of God that can change the heart of the people, the one delivering the word as well as the receiver. Therefore, the Bible Study Outlines have been included as a guide to assist the pastors, teachers and church leaders in leading studies and healthy discussion concerning what the Bible says about domestic violence in a way that is not threatening but bring healing and wholeness to all. For example, the study entitled *Christ Makes Us New Creatures*, speaks to the nature of the “old man”, how Christ makes the difference, the importance of our faith, how those in Christ are changed and the old becomes new. Prayerfully this will be a springboard for church leaders to look deeper into the Word of God, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead them as they write mor studies for answers and create a safe space for healthy conversation.

Appendix D contains four sermon topic suggestions which include a possible sermon topic along with individual propositions as starting points. Again, to help pastors who have never thought about what the Bible has to say or even if the Bible speaks on the subject of domestic violence begin to “create space” for the Holy Spirit to speak to them as they do the study and preparation. Therefore, preparing a sermon on *No More Silence* will challenge and encourage the preacher/teacher to speak up where they have been silent and encourage hearers to not be silent about their abuse. Appendix E contains seven exegetical sermon outlines to help began the

conversation through the preaching moment for preachers who need a “little push” to get started and provides an example of how to craft a sermon around the difficult topic of domestic violence. Appendix F contains six affirmation litanies to be read during worship services or at specific support groups. Again, the litanies, like the *Litany of Hope*, will give voice to the issue and prayerfully encourage all present to begin or continue the conversations around domestic violence and at least provide hope. Appendix G contains the post-survey, which is the same as the pre-survey, and intended to be conducted after the training. This researcher will then compile the data, share the data with pastors and church leaders, and then develop methods and means for use by my congregation and others in the fight to eradicate domestic violence within congregations.

### **Research Complications and Unknowns**

The researcher quickly discovered that in order to adequately accommodate victims of domestic violence within African American churches there exists a sincere need to prepare church leaders first. Collection of raw data included 62 individuals ranging from senior pastors, other clergy and church leaders. What the researcher did not fully anticipate were limited knowledge bases of participants which amplified complications associated with confronting domestic violence within congregational settings. As such, the researcher will strategize in a manner to first include her pastor and church leaders, as well as others in the hope that once armed with certain knowledge the tendency to shy away from the topic might be minimized. Future participants in surveys and those receiving information containing ways to confront domestic violence will primarily be through general online surveys, and emails. A future goal of the researcher is to conduct a training workshop with local domestic violence organizations and

churches to build healthy working relationships and use what is available to support those in need who sit in our pews each Sunday. Knowing in advance the reality of very limited information regarding domestic violence within congregations, I contend that, given guides and starter approaches on how to work through domestic violence issues, forward progress can be made.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### OUTCOMES

#### **Breaking the Silence**

Outcomes associated with the research of this thesis-project are primarily empirical. As expected, some of the empirical unknowns include; the uncertainty of the truthfulness of the responses of the recipients, personal bias concerning the subject matter, personal bias concerning gender equality, experience and knowledge base concerning domestic violence, past or present acknowledgement of experience as an abuser, the abused or a witness of abuse and accuracy of church climate.

As stated previously, this researcher set out to collect data through pre-surveys, interviews, and educational material by various contributors. While these were lofty goals, I soon came to the realization that information and data associated with domestic violence within my congregation and other churches in the area did not exist. Although the church I serve reports annually on new members, finances, deaths, baby dedications, hospital visits, special projects and the like, we do not keep statistics on domestic violence cases even on a confidential basis.

Domestic violence within local congregations is a reality, but it became painfully evident that there is no data collection, at least none pastors were willing to share, and I was left with the challenge to devise ways in which to start overt conversations with pastors, clergy, and church leaders while sharing with them what I discovered and what we as pastors and church leaders must do going forward.

This researcher discovered that, shockingly, after fifty-plus years, the residual effects and the profound impact emotionally and spiritually domestic violence left in my life. Researching this subject matter produced triggers that awakened some very real and painful buried memories



I did not realize still existed in me. This realization gave me greater appreciation for the Institutional Review Board process. It also gave me a resolve to “make some noise”, to “be heard”, to “sound the alarm” in our churches and communities concerning domestic violence and then do something, anything except keep silent. In letting victims know they are valued and allowing them to give voice to their pain unapologetically, my desire is that they are heard and get the help and support they need!

“Given the large number of persons who are directly affected by violence and abuse, we can safely assume that in virtually every church gathering, from Sunday worship to the occasional potluck, we are all in the room at any given time, victim/survivors, offenders, and bystanders. So, our consideration of effective ministry has to take this reality in to account.”<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to domestic violence, may we not be found guilty of the words in Ezekiel chapter 34, “You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.”<sup>2</sup> There is a plethora of resources and training available and as clergy and church leaders we must ask for forgiveness, seek help, ask for guidance, and, once we are trained and equipped, we must act. Then as leaders, after we find our voices, then and only then can we begin to help those who have been silenced find theirs.

Domestic Violence destroys individuals, families and leaves a stain in the communities where it has raised its ugly head. The church has been a beacon of light in times past on many issues concerning human rights, social justice and a voice for the oppressed. There are many reasons for not being actively involved especially when domestic violence comes to the church,

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1. Marie M Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 219.

2. Ezekiel 34:4, NIV.

concerns about divorce, risk and safety for all concerned, being a busy body by interfering in family business, apathy, other pressing ministry issues and lack of training but now is not the time to keep silent when it comes to domestic violence.

The church is called to minister to the downtrodden and the broken hearted. We can be more involved in the local programs, offer awareness and support through small groups like Celebrate Recovery and Divorce Care, advocate for the rights of the victims, build a referral list of agencies, shelters, have a safety plan and a strategic plan for working with local law enforcement, social workers, counselors, working collectively with other churches in your local community creating a network or task force and finally include money in the church budget to support organizations and to provide a temporary safe haven for victims as needed.

Moving forward it is my desire to see the ministry in which I serve become a more active participant with the organizations within our community who serve those victims of domestic violence. Ironically, one of the main organizations that deals with domestic violence and provides excellent training, of which I have been a recipient, is less than three miles from the church and we budget to support them financially each year. We are at a pivotal point and hopefully moving with a forward thrust to limit and eliminate domestic violence within our church. But I realize that education, training and conversation, from the pulpit to the pew and from the pew to the parking lot and points beyond, is the key.

It is time for leaders to take a stand and give voice to what is just and what is right. The prophet Micah gives a mandate for all of us as spiritual leaders to follow, when he asked the age old question that is still relevant today; “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you? But to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”<sup>3</sup> In

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3. Micha 6:8, NKJV.

our efforts to eliminate domestic violence this mandate gives a balanced answer to the spiritual and ethical question, what does the Lord require of you? How will the church respond?

How will these outcomes affect my ministry? Glaz and Moessner suggest,

A supportive theological presence is vitally important through emotional crises. The ministry of presence is important, women speak repeatedly of the calming effect of a trusted person just *showing up* just being on hand as a listener, to hear their heartbeat and be with the person. It takes a lot of training not to do much talking. Women do not want advice or judgment, theological platitudes, or simplistic reassurances. The kind of process women want from pastors has the potential for calling forth a fuller humanity for both the pastor and women congregants because it allows both to be in a faith process together.”<sup>4</sup>

Although, Glaz and Moessner are speaking exclusively to the plight of women in abusive relationships, this is still good, wise, godly counsel for all concerned regardless of gender.

### **Where Will This Take Us?**

As a faith community we must stay committed to the work of eliminating domestic violence within our churches “and not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”<sup>5</sup> As a congregation we are doing our part financially by including funds in our annual budget to support organizations and shelters in our local area committed to assisting those who are victims of domestic violence. We also support the shelters monthly by providing meals, clothing, and supplies to assist those in need.

### **Where Can We Do Better?**

I believe our *sanctuaries* should be just that – a place of safety for those who are exposed to unsafe situations. We need to provide resources and information for congregants to take as

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4. Jeanne Stevenson Moessner and Maxine Glaz, *Women in Travail and Transition: A New Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1991), 121.

5. Galatians 6:9, NKJV.

needed, strategically placing it in the high traffic areas like our information booths in our narthex and in the privacy of a restroom stall. We can also highlight Domestic Violence Awareness and Prevention in our services during the month of October, like we do Breast Cancer Awareness and other days. The Bible study outlines, sermon topics, sermon manuscripts and litanies in appendices C through F are all examples, starters, helpers, aids to assist the church preachers and teachers begin to move in the right direction in handling the word of God appropriately and the people of God with great care, spiritually maturity when it come to what the Bible and the church has to say about domestic violence. In the words of the scared text, “let them who have ears, hear what the Spirit is saying.”<sup>6</sup>

*As passionate, reflective, practitioners*, we need to be intentional in our actions by incorporating the appropriate subject matter concerning domestic violence in premarital and marriage counseling. As clergy,

We have to claim our own accountability in this issue and work to bring an appropriate critique of the damaging sexist assumptions in our theological positions. We need to reaffirm God’s creative and redeeming presence along with the theme of God’s love for all people. God’s people have always been called to recognize those who have been oppressed, even in the name of religion, and to empower and bring liberation to them. With the power of God’s spirit, we can find ways to know God, ourselves, and one another through stories and images that enhance, rather than damage, spiritual self-esteem.<sup>7</sup>

If we do these well, we will finally help and encourage victims of domestic violence to live holistically, to take off the mask of fear and shame, to come out of the darkness of domestic violence and walk into health, joy, wholeness and the marvelous light of God, knowing that they matter to God and to us.

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6 Rev: 2:29, NIV.

7. Glaz and Moessner, *Women in Travail and Transition*, 154-155.

### **Looking Ahead: What Else Needs to Be Done?**

As discovered in the pre-survey questionnaire for pastors, clergy and church leaders there is a need and a willingness for information and training concerning domestic violence. Although anonymous, some participants who completed the pre-survey have made it known to the researcher how excited they are to see the subject of domestic violence within the church starting to be addressed and look forward to the conversation and the training.

The researcher is currently working with “ACTS” and “Turning Points”, the local organizations specializing in domestic violence, to roll out our first training day with clergy and church leaders. After which, a refresher training for all clergy and laity will be added to our church calendar annually. As the assistant pastor, I am responsible for clergy training and we will incorporate training and exercises dealing with preaching and teaching about domestic violence, which will be centered around study of Scriptural texts addressing the issue of domestic violence. The researcher is also working with the local ministerial association to incorporate domestic violence training as a part of their annual calendar and hopefully get the conversation concerning domestic violence started in other churches and houses of worship. The hope is to encourage the people to embrace the message that domestic violence of any form to anyone will not be tolerated by the people of God. Finally, it is my prayer this thesis-project, in addressing the need for education and training about domestic violence in the church will be for the good of the people and to the glory of God.

## APPENDIX A

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE KNOWLEDGE PRE-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE



This questionnaire is designed to explore the needs and knowledge base of clergy and church leaders concerning domestic violence within their Christian context and surrounding community. This includes the appropriate way to address the topic from a biblical perspective in pastoral counseling and member care. The information you provide will be helpful for developing training modules for preaching, teaching and pastoral care and counseling in support of victims dealing with domestic violence.

This survey is being conducted by Sandra K. James, Doctor of Ministry candidate, Gordon Cornwell Theology Seminary. Please be assured that your responses will be kept strictly confidential. The information you provide will be presented only in summary form, in combination with responses from other participants of this survey. Your responses will never be linked with your name. **By completing this questionnaire, you have given your consent that you are a voluntary participant in this survey.**

**PROCEDURES:** If you agree to participate, your involvement will last for 7-10 minutes to complete a short survey. If any follow up is necessary, it will be schedule at a time most convenient for you not to exceed 30 minutes.

**RISKS:** There are no known risk associated with this research project. Although there may be some possible discomfort in providing honest answers. Should you need to speak to someone concerning any emotional or spiritual discomfort or triggers as a result of completing this survey please call the Center for Pastoral Care and Counseling at (703) 903-9696 to speak to a counselor.

**BENEFITS:** The potential personal benefits that may occur as a result of your participation in this study are you will have the opportunity to share your perspective and knowledge and contribute in the training of other clergy and church leadership concerning domestic violence.

**COMPENSATION:** You **will not** be compensated for participating in this research project.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. To ensure confidentiality no identifying personal information will be used, printed information will be stored in a secure file cabinet and electronic information will be password protected. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:** Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to take part, or if you stop participating at any time, your decision

will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. Any data collected from the participant prior to withdrawal from the study will be included if relevant to the study or destroyed).

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact Sandra K. James, (703) 969-1887, or email, sanjam40@hotmail.com. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Co-Chair of the Institutional Review Board, Dr. David A. Currie, or email, dcurrie@gordonconwell.edu or 978-646-417.

***Please complete and submit this survey by Saturday, 16, 2019. Thank You.***

**Working Definition of Domestic Violence is;** a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another. **Domestic violence** can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that exhibit control and influence over another person. **Spiritual abuse** is the misappropriation of scripture by clergy and church leaders thereby inflicting more harm on victims causing greater damage to those seeking spiritual guidance.

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**Circle One:**

1. Gender: Male or Female.
2. Age in years: 24 and under; 24-34; 35-44; 45-54; 55-64; 65 and above.
3. Ministry Title: Senior Pastor; Clergy; Church Leader.
4. Education: Seminary Graduate, College Graduate, Other.

**Scale: 5-point Likert:** (5) Strongly Agree, (4) Agree, (3) Neutral, (2) Disagree, (1) Strongly Disagree

---

**Circle One**

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 5 4 3 2 1 | 1. My formal education adequately trained me to deal with issues concerning domestic violence.   |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | 2. I am comfortable in my abilities to adequately provide appropriate pastoral care and counseling when dealing with domestic violence issues in the church. |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | 3. The Bible speaks to the issues of domestic violence.  |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | 4. I have addressed the issue of domestic violence within my church.   |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | 5. I am aware of at least one domestic violence situation presently  |

ongoing within my church.

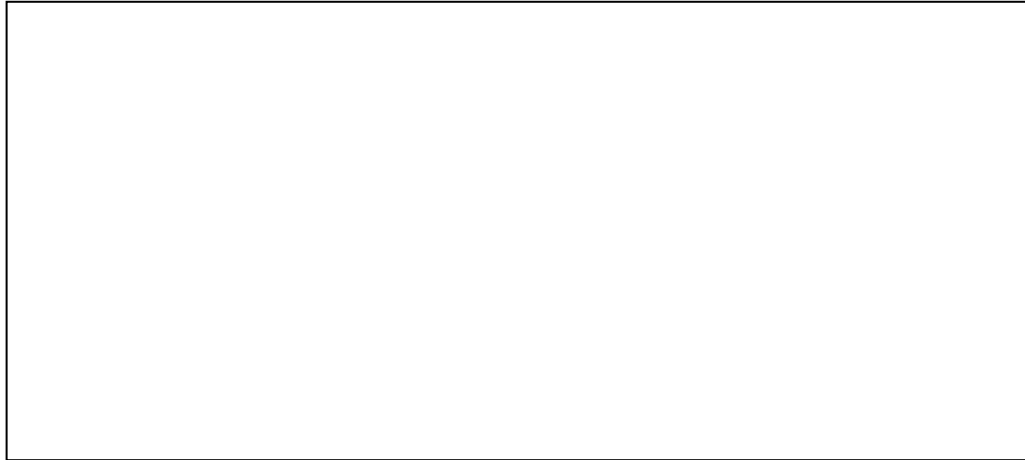
- 5 4 3 2 1 6. In my tenure as pastor/clergy/leader, I have dealt with at least one or more issues of domestic violence.
- 5 4 3 2 1 7. I am aware of the resources in my community that provide assistance to victims of domestic violence.
- 5 4 3 2 1 8. I am knowledgeable of the referral process for victims of domestic violence.
- 5 4 3 2 1 9. The leadership and ministerial staff of my church have received training on how to appropriately handle domestic violence issues.
- 5 4 3 2 1 10. Under my leadership this church has addressed domestic violence in some form (i.e. ministry awareness, educational awareness campaign, or financial support to community organizations).
- 5 4 3 2 1 11. It is my desire for anyone in the community who suffers from domestic violence, to feel comfort coming to the church (pastor and or staff) for assistance and support.
- 5 4 3 2 1 12. I know what resources are available within the community to provide training to my pastoral care staff with assisting, supporting and referring domestic violence victims.
- 5 4 3 2 1 14. My church has adequate resources to assist in providing services to victims of domestic violence.
- 5 4 3 2 1 15. My church needs more resources to assist victims of domestic violence.
- 5 4 3 2 1 16. The demands for domestic violence services outweighs available resources in my community.
- 5 4 3 2 1 17. I know where to refer a woman for help who is a victim of domestic violence.
- 5 4 3 2 1 18. I know where to refer a man for help who is a victim of domestic violence.
- 5 4 3 2 1 19. I know where to refer a child affected by domestic violence.
- 5 4 3 2 1 20. I am comfortable teaching and preaching about domestic violence and what the bible has to say concerning this issue.
- 5 4 3 2 1 21. I need training on how to preach and teach on issues of domestic violence.



5 4 3 2 1 22. I need training in pastoral care and counseling concerning domestic violence.

5 4 3 2 1 23. If offered I would attend domestic violence training.

**You may add any additional comments here:**

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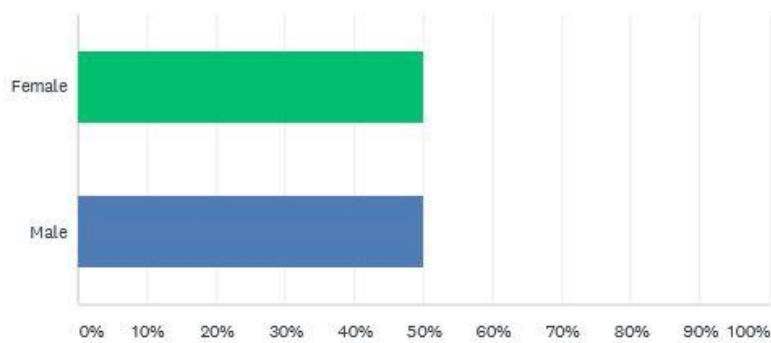
## APPENDIX B

### PRE-SURVEY RESULTS

Domestic Violence (DV) Knowledge Questionnaire 2019

#### Q1 Gender

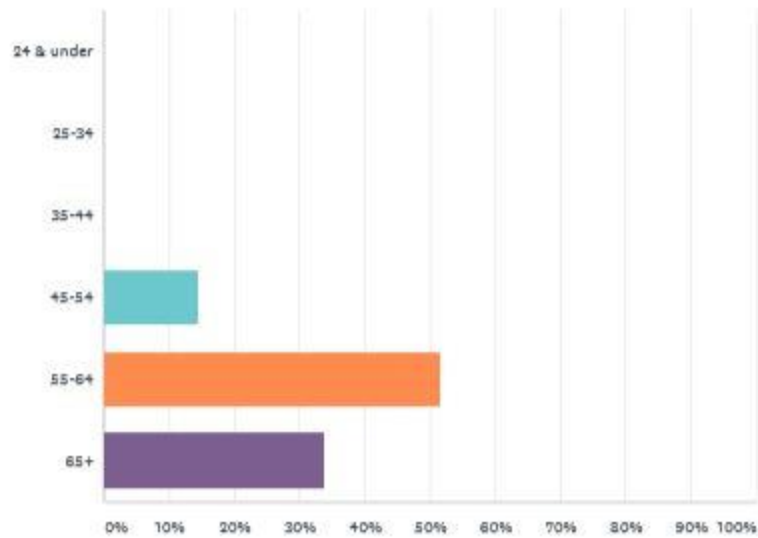
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Female	50.00%	31
Male	50.00%	31
TOTAL		62

## Q2 Age

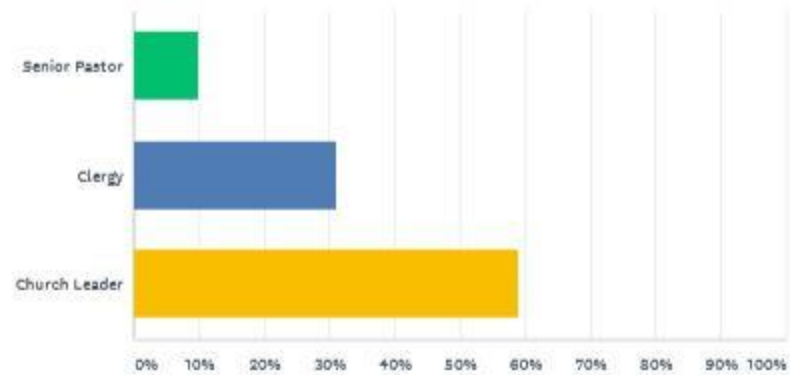
Answered: 62 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
24 & under	0.00%	0
25-34	0.00%	0
35-44	0.00%	0
45-54	14.52%	9
55-64	51.61%	32
65+	33.87%	21
TOTAL		62

Q3 Select One

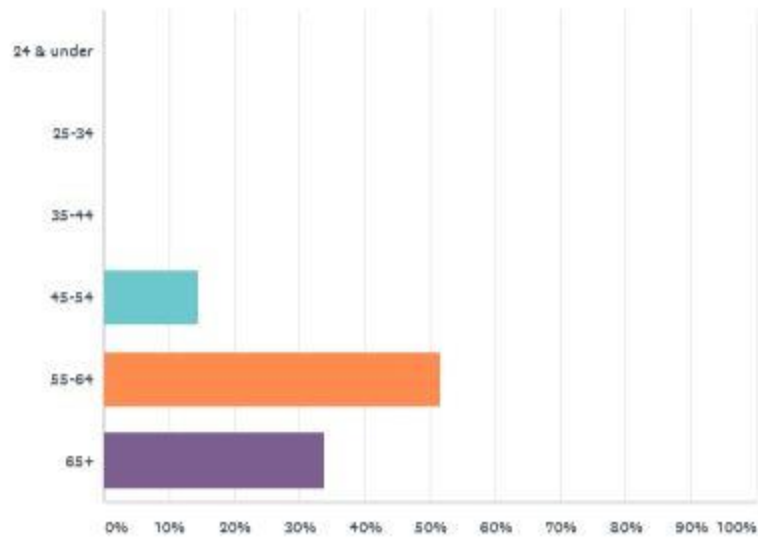
Answered: 61 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Senior Pastor	9.84%	6
Clergy	31.15%	19
Church Leader	59.02%	36
TOTAL		61

## Q2 Age

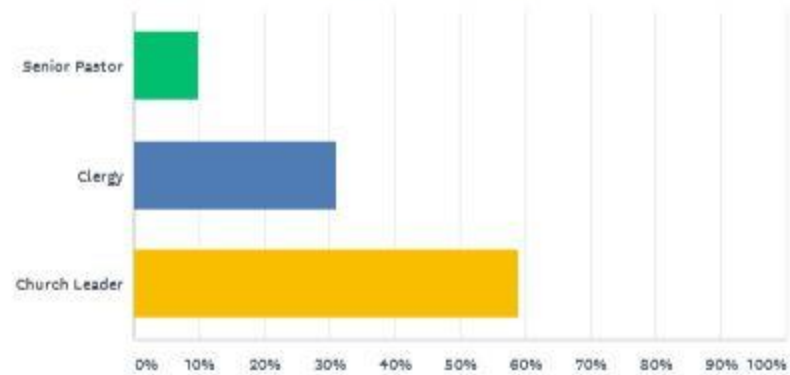
Answered: 62 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
24 & under	0.00%	0
25-34	0.00%	0
35-44	0.00%	0
45-54	14.52%	9
55-64	51.61%	32
65+	33.87%	21
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>62</b>

Q3 Select One

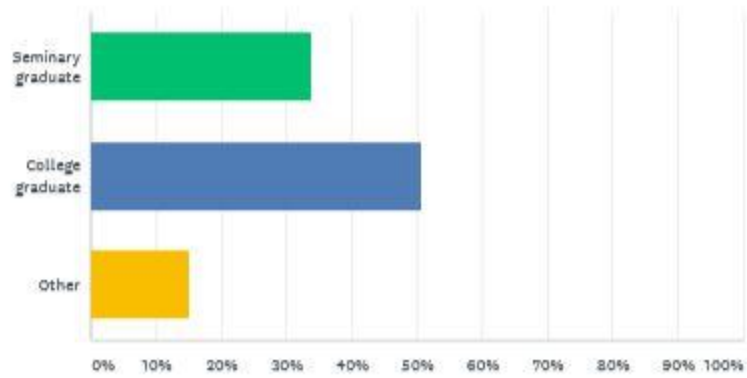
Answered: 61 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Senior Pastor	9.84%	6
Clergy	31.15%	19
Church Leader	59.02%	36
TOTAL		61

## Q4 Select one

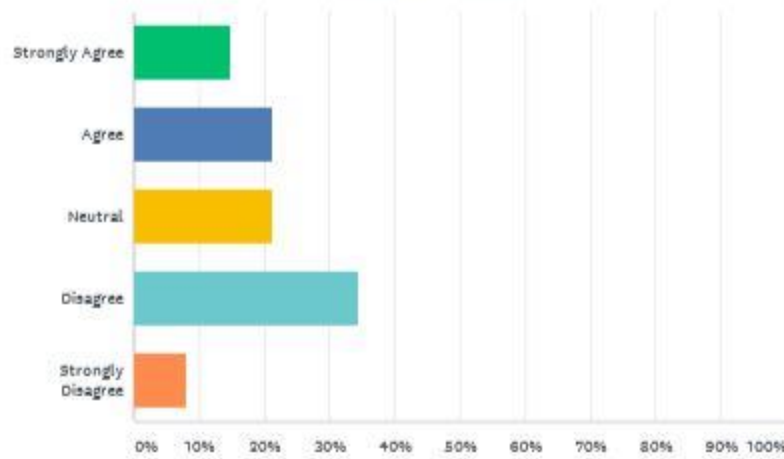
Answered: 59 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Seminary graduate	33.90%	20
College graduate	50.85%	30
Other	15.25%	9
TOTAL		59

Q5 My formal education adequately trained me to deal with issues concerning domestic violence.

Answered: 61 Skipped: 1

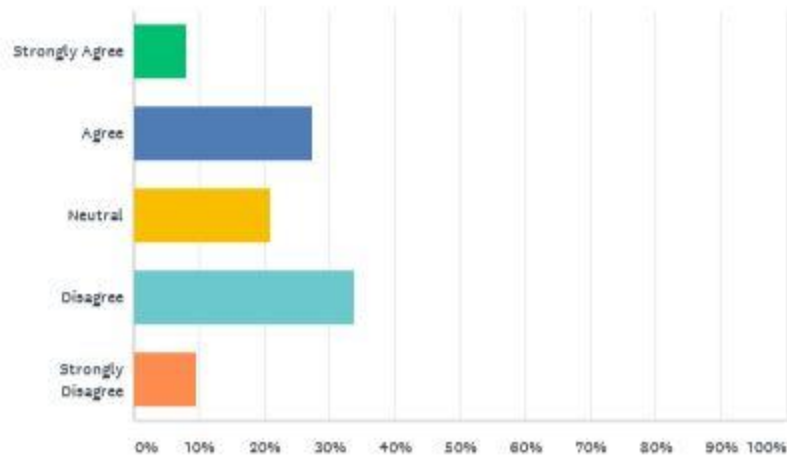


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	14.75%	9
Agree	21.31%	13
Neutral	21.31%	13
Disagree	34.43%	21
Strongly Disagree	8.20%	5
TOTAL		61



Q6 I am comfortable in my abilities to adequately provide appropriate pastoral care and counseling when dealing with domestic violence issues in the church.

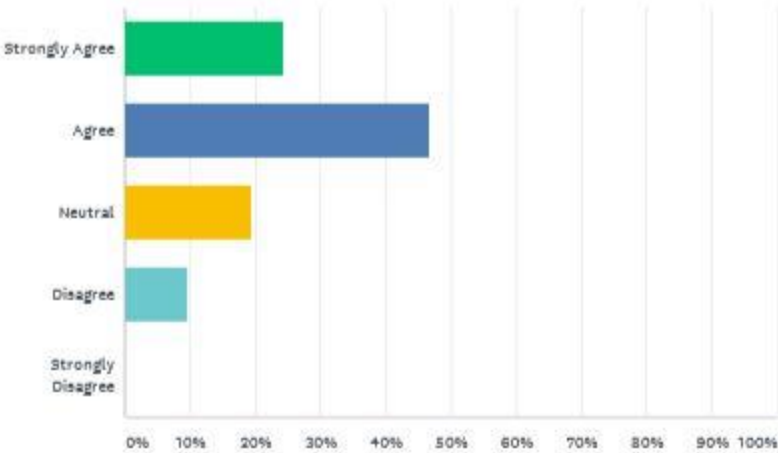
Answered: 62 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	8.06%	5
Agree	27.42%	17
Neutral	20.97%	13
Disagree	33.87%	21
Strongly Disagree	9.68%	6
TOTAL		62

Q7 The Bible speaks to the issues of domestic violence.

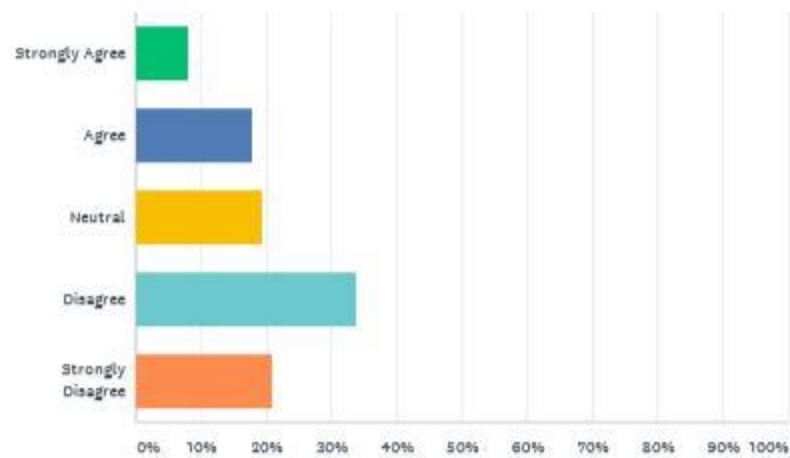
Answered: 62 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	24.19%	15
Agree	46.77%	29
Neutral	19.35%	12
Disagree	9.68%	6
Strongly Disagree	0.00%	0
TOTAL		62

Q8 I have addressed the issue of domestic violence within my church.

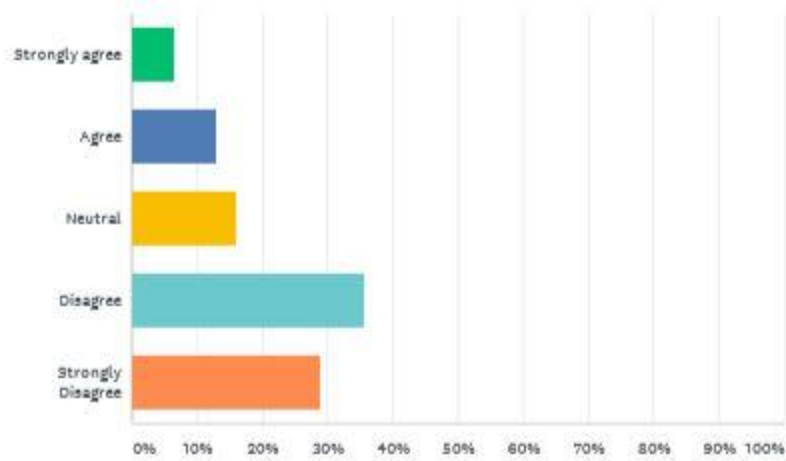
Answered: 62 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	8.06%	5
Agree	17.74%	11
Neutral	19.35%	12
Disagree	33.87%	21
Strongly Disagree	20.97%	13
TOTAL		62

Q9 I am aware of at least one domestic violence situation presently ongoing within my church.

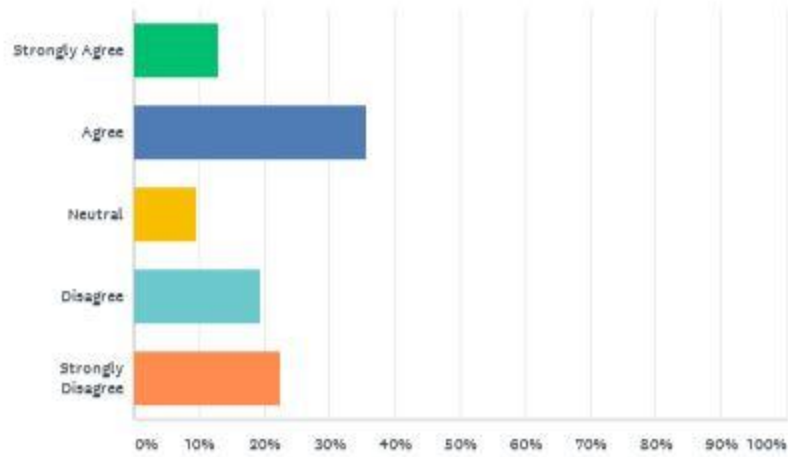
Answered: 62 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	6.45%	4
Agree	12.90%	8
Neutral	16.13%	10
Disagree	35.48%	22
Strongly Disagree	29.03%	18
TOTAL		62

Q10 In my tenure as pastor/clergy/leader, I have dealt with at least one or more issues of domestic violence.

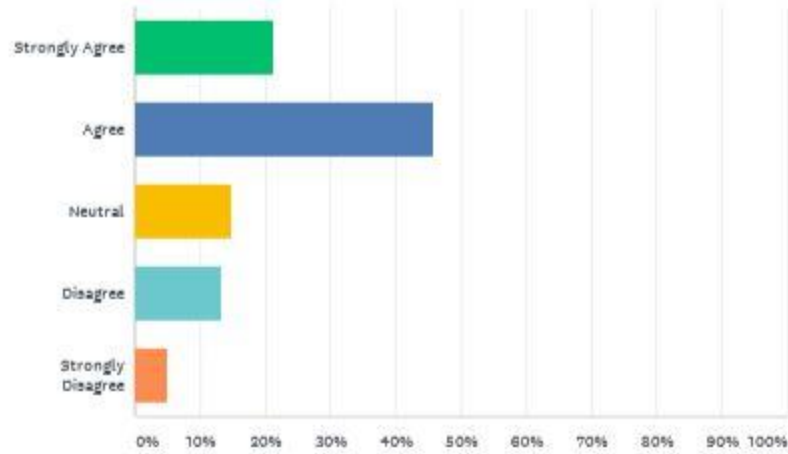
Answered: 62 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	12.90%	8
Agree	35.48%	22
Neutral	9.68%	6
Disagree	19.35%	12
Strongly Disagree	22.58%	14
TOTAL		62

Q11 I am aware of the resources in my community that provide assistance to victims in the area of domestic violence.

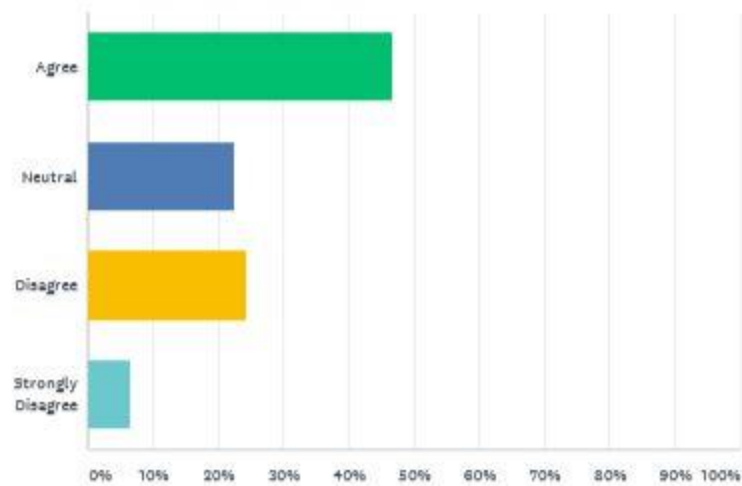
Answered: 61 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	21.31%	13
Agree	45.90%	28
Neutral	14.75%	9
Disagree	13.11%	8
Strongly Disagree	4.92%	3
TOTAL		61

Q12 I am knowledgeable of the referral process for victims of domestic violence.

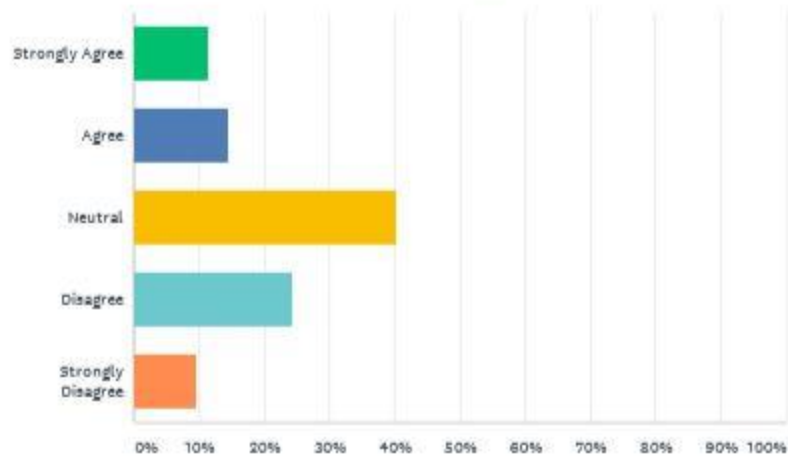
Answered: 62 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Agree	46.77%	29
Neutral	22.58%	14
Disagree	24.19%	15
Strongly Disagree	6.45%	4
TOTAL		62

Q13 The leaders and ministerial staff of my church have received training on how to appropriately handle domestic violence issues.

Answered: 62 Skipped: 0

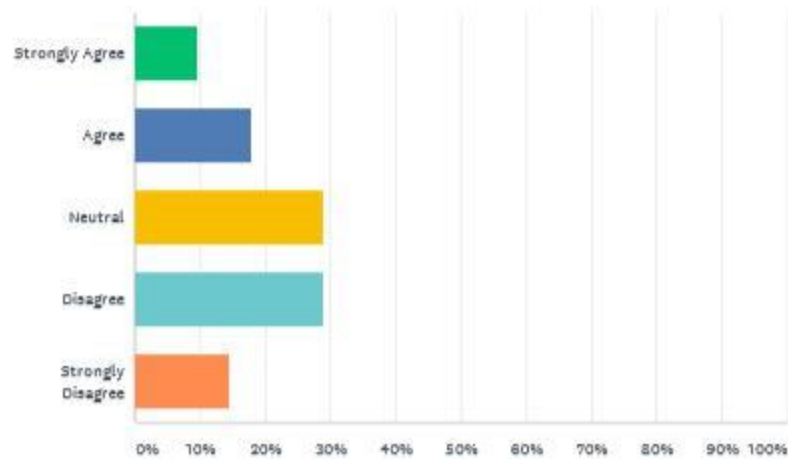


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	11.29%	7
Agree	14.52%	9
Neutral	40.32%	25
Disagree	24.19%	15
Strongly Disagree	9.68%	6
TOTAL		62



Q14 Under my leadership this church has addressed the issue of domestic violence in some form (i.e. ministry awareness, educational awareness campaign or financial support to community organizations).

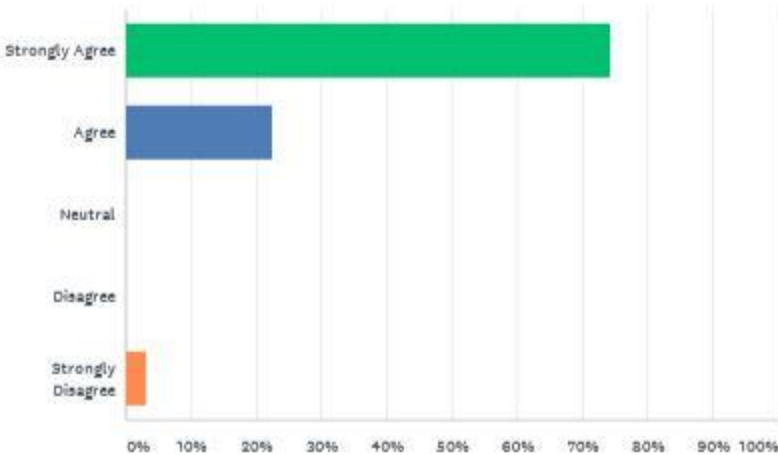
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	9.68%	6
Agree	17.74%	11
Neutral	29.03%	18
Disagree	29.03%	18
Strongly Disagree	14.52%	9
TOTAL		62

Q15 It is my desire for anyone in the community who suffers from domestic violence, to feel comfortable coming to the church (pastor and or staff) for assistance and support.

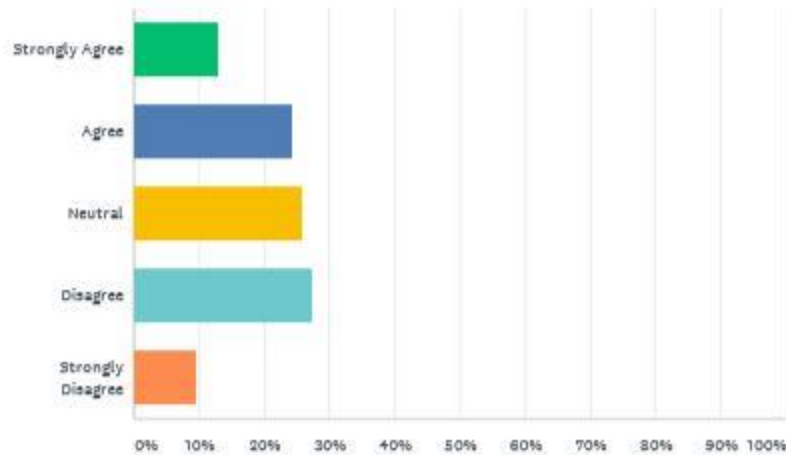
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	74.19%	46
Agree	22.58%	14
Neutral	0.00%	0
Disagree	0.00%	0
Strongly Disagree	3.23%	2
TOTAL		62

Q16 I know what resources are available within the community to provide training to my pastoral care staff with assisting, supporting and referring domestics violence victims.

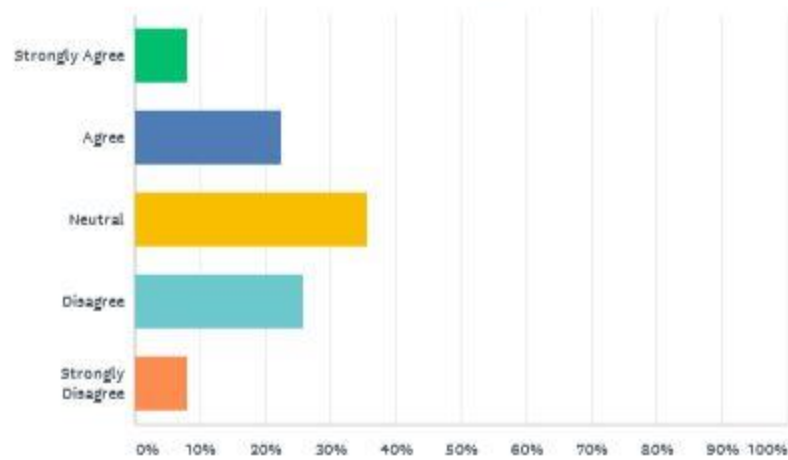
Answered: 62 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	12.90%	8
Agree	24.19%	15
Neutral	25.81%	16
Disagree	27.42%	17
Strongly Disagree	9.68%	6
TOTAL		62

Q17 My church has adequate resources to assist in providing services to victims of domestic violence.

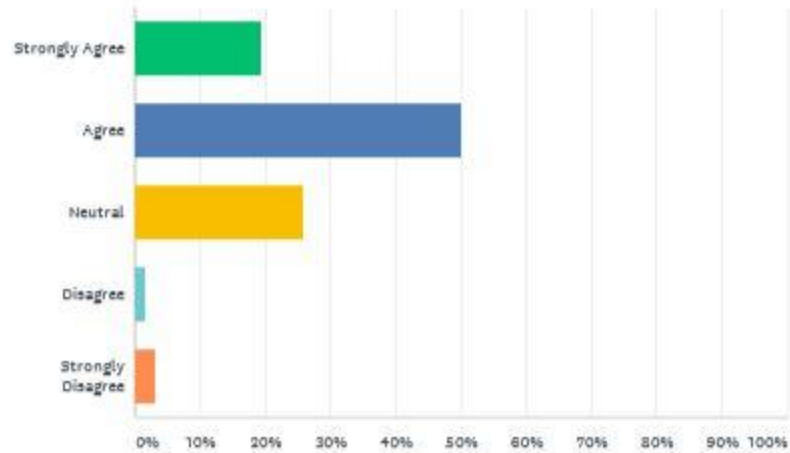
Answered: 62 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	8.06%	5
Agree	22.58%	14
Neutral	35.48%	22
Disagree	25.81%	16
Strongly Disagree	8.06%	5
TOTAL		62

# Q18 My church needs more resources to assist victims of domestic violence.

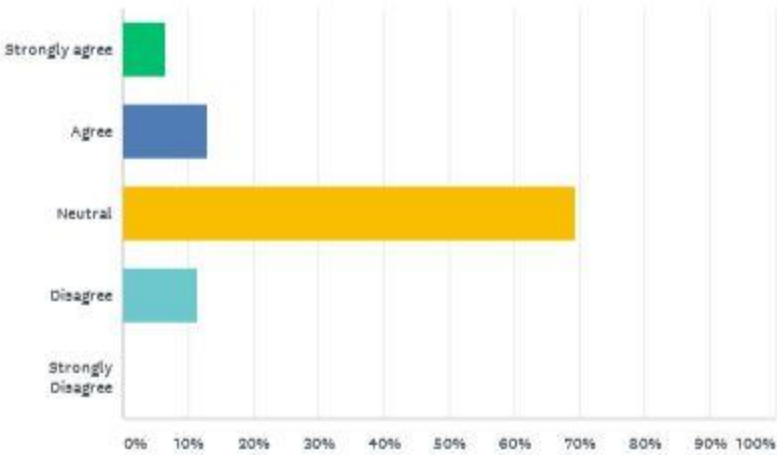
Answered: 62 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	19.35%	12
Agree	50.00%	31
Neutral	25.81%	16
Disagree	1.61%	1
Strongly Disagree	3.23%	2
TOTAL		62

Q19 The demands for domestic violence services outweigh available resources in my community.

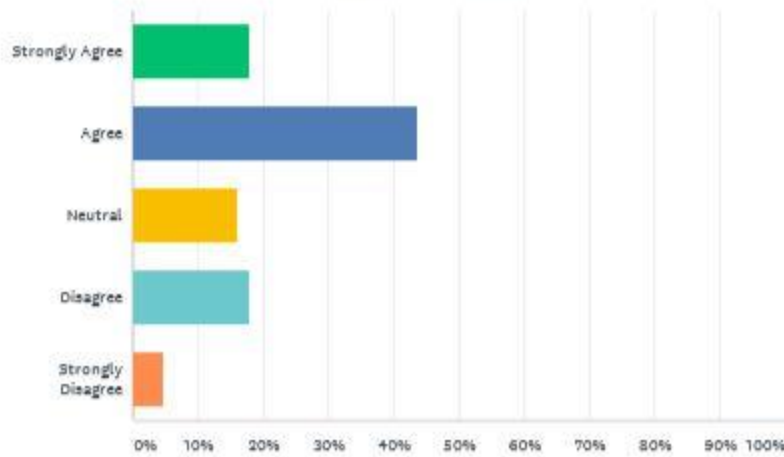
Answered: 62 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	6.45%	4
Agree	12.90%	8
Neutral	69.35%	43
Disagree	11.29%	7
Strongly Disagree	0.00%	0
TOTAL		62

Q20 I know where to refer a woman for help who is a victim of domestic violence.

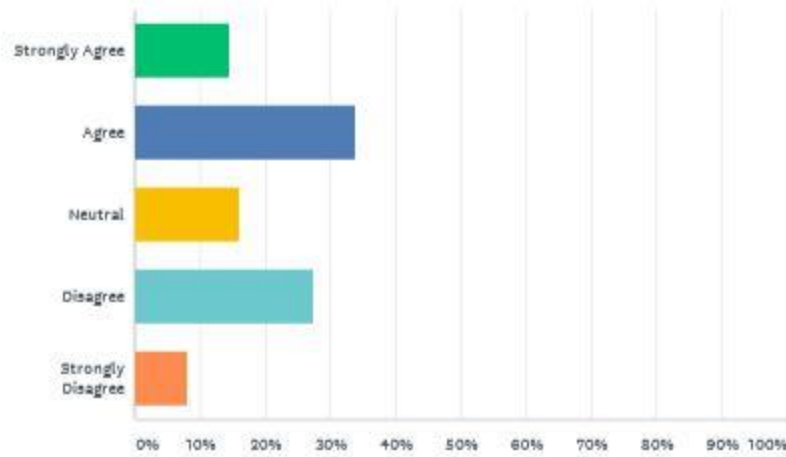
Answered: 62 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	17.74%	11
Agree	43.55%	27
Neutral	16.13%	10
Disagree	17.74%	11
Strongly Disagree	4.84%	3
TOTAL		62

Q21 I know where to refer a man for help who is a victim of domestic violence.

Answered: 62 Skipped: 0

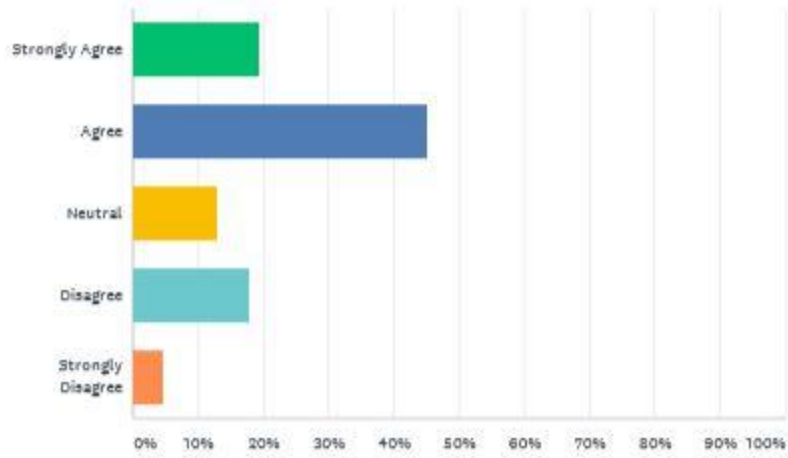


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	14.52%	9
Agree	33.87%	21
Neutral	16.13%	10
Disagree	27.42%	17
Strongly Disagree	8.06%	5
TOTAL		62



## Q22 I know where to refer a child affected by domestic violence.

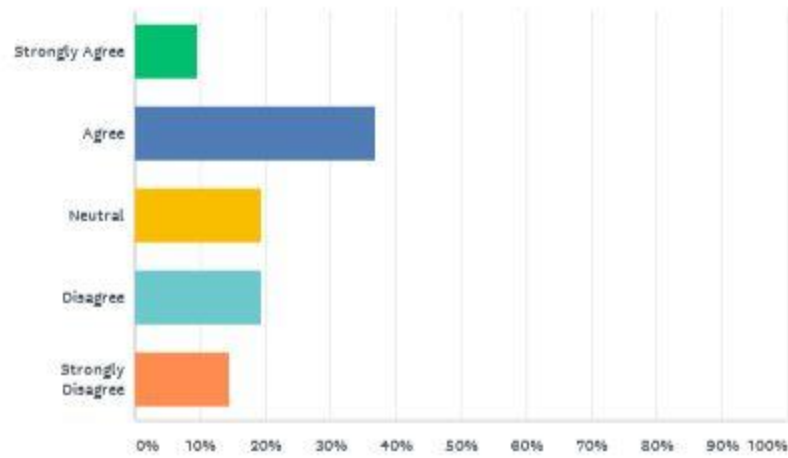
Answered: 62 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	19.35%	12
Agree	45.16%	28
Neutral	12.90%	8
Disagree	17.74%	11
Strongly Disagree	4.84%	3
TOTAL		62

Q23 I am comfortable teaching and preaching about domestic violence and what the bible has to say concerning this issue.

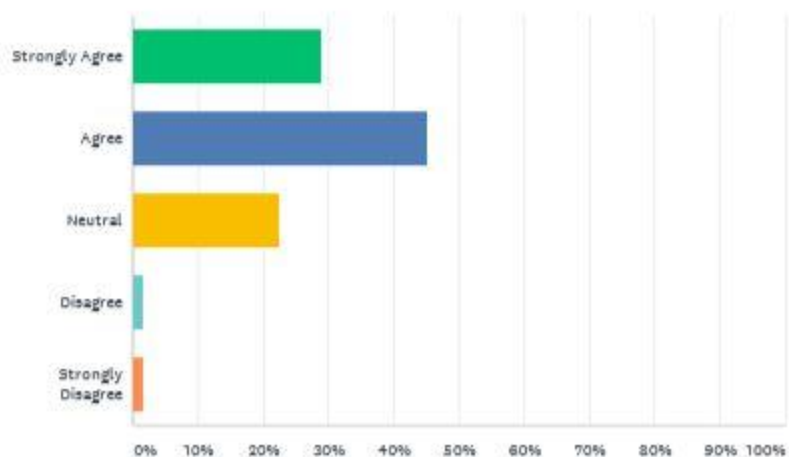
Answered: 62 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	9.68%	6
Agree	37.10%	23
Neutral	19.35%	12
Disagree	19.35%	12
Strongly Disagree	14.52%	9
TOTAL		62

# Q24 I need training on how to preach and teach on issues of domestic violence.

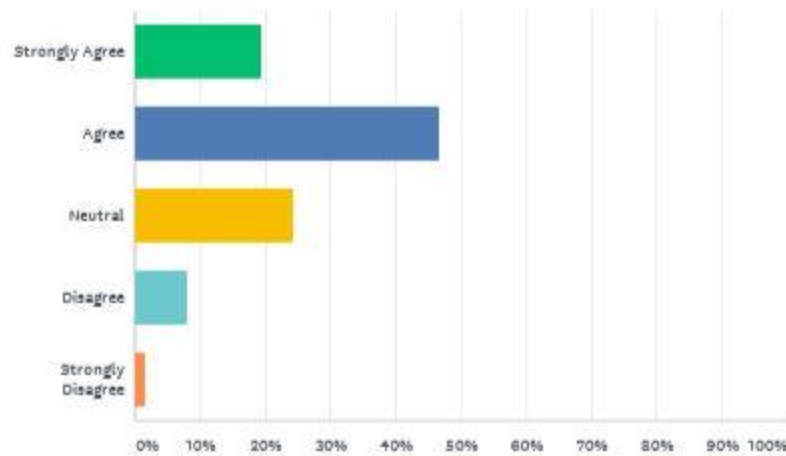
Answered: 62 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	29.03%	18
Agree	45.16%	28
Neutral	22.58%	14
Disagree	1.61%	1
Strongly Disagree	1.61%	1
TOTAL		62

# Q25 I need training in pastoral care and counseling concerning domestic violence.

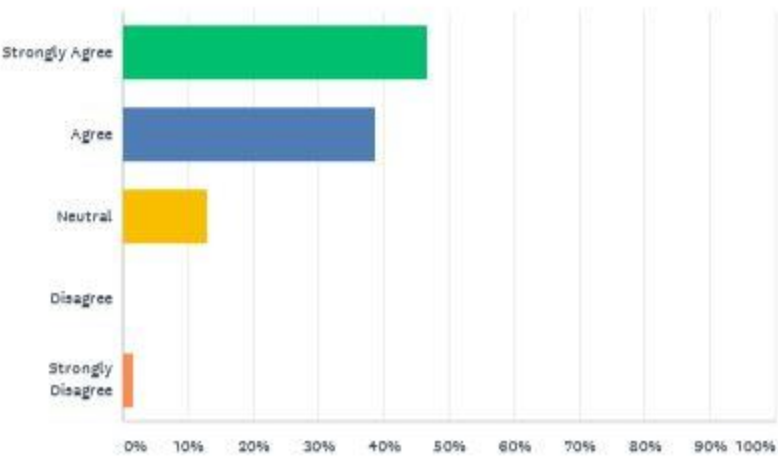
Answered: 62 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	19.35%	12
Agree	46.77%	29
Neutral	24.19%	15
Disagree	8.06%	5
Strongly Disagree	1.61%	1
TOTAL		62

Q26 If offered, I would attend domestic violence training.

Answered: 62 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	46.77%	29
Agree	38.71%	24
Neutral	12.90%	8
Disagree	0.00%	0
Strongly Disagree	1.61%	1
TOTAL		62

Q27 You may add any additional comments here.

Answered: 22 Skipped: 40

## APPENDIX C

### EIGHT BIBLE STUDY OUTLINES

Retrieved from: Spiros Zodhiates, Th.D. 1992. *Exegetical Preaching: Fifty-two New Testament Sermon Outlines*. AMG Publishing. Chattanooga

#### PUTTING CHRIST FIRST

Key Verse: Matthew 16:24

##### **I. True Disciples are devoted to Christ**

- A. There are three characteristics of man: self, family, possessions. Anyone who places these before the Lord Jesus, cannot be His disciple. This is clearly delineated in the words of Christ.
  - 1. “If any man will come after me. Let him deny himself” (Matt. 16:24). Love for oneself is a standard for measuring the amount of love we have for others (Matt. 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27). Love for self is innate and is the primary concern of an unbeliever.
  - 2. “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke:14:26).
  - 3. “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33).
- B. Christ did not conceal from inquirers who wanted to follow Him what the grace of God would accomplish in a believer. He did not promise eternal life which resides dormant in the human heart. He offered God’s grace which brings a complete change by putting Christ’s new life in man. The old nature which put’s self, family, or possessions first, is put off by the new nature. “Lie not to one another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds” (Col. 3:9). This “putting off” of the old man is equivalent to believing on the Lord Jesus. It takes God’s grace to do this (Eph. 2:8). Christ comes to dwell within us. Our old Adamic nature no longer has uncontested control, but it is not eliminated. Paul had to struggle between the victorious nature of Christ within him and the sin that dwelt in him. This is why he said, “it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me” (Rom. 7:17)
- C. When an unbeliever understands what will automatically take place as a result of salvation, he may be honest enough to reject it like the rich young ruler who came

to Jesus (Matt. 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-23). Jesus told him what must happen in his life for him to receive Christ's grace or eternal life: he must be willing to give up his possessions. Jesus knew that this was not what the man wanted to do but this did not change His declaration of truth. Therefore, the man remained rich materially, but spiritually poor.

- D. the Lord Jesus in no way demands that all who follow Him sell all their belongings and give them to the poor. However, when He saves a person, He must be first in that person's life. Family and possessions must be available for the altar of sacrifice for His sake. The same Christ who told this young man "sell that thou hast and give to the poor" (Matt. 19:21) also said "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). The same Christ also said "For what is a man profited. If he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). What Christ impresses us with is that with Jesus Christ first in our hearts and lives we are always winners. When Jesus Christ is first, I fully enjoy myself, my family, and my possessions. All life is then subject to His command and direction.

## **II. The call to cross-nearing was for all who would follow Jesus.**

- A. The fact that Jesus was speaking to His disciples in Matthew 16:21, 24 has given some people the wrong impression that the call to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus is only addressed to believers.
- B. In Mark 8:34, however, we see that He was not speaking to his disciples only, "And when he had called the people unto him with his disciple also. . ." and also in Luke 9:23, "And he said unto them all. . . ."
- C. He did not address his disciples directly when he said "If any man will come after me" (Matt. 16:24); "Whosoever will come after me. . ." (Mark 8:34); "If any man will come after me. . ." (Luke 9:23). These apply to non-believers just as John 3:16 does. Jesus wanted those who would truly follow Him as His disciples to know that the acceptance of His grace revolutionizes an individual. Christ not only comes to live within, but there is a constant renewal of the new nature which gives the old self last place. There is a glory of grace that no love of self, relatives, or possessions can give. The call to be a disciple is to all men. And the first step is trusting in Him for eternal life.

## **III. A disciple of Christ lives a balanced life**

- A. The Greek verb in Luke 14:33 translated "forsaketh" explains the philosophy of a disciple of Christ. "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." The Greek word is *apotàssomai* derived from *apò*, "from, or away from oneself," and *tàssomai* which means "to place in the proper category." The Lord never taught reckless abandonment of self, relatives, or possessions. He wants us as believers to put them where they belong. They should come after Christ. We should never love God with the love which belongs to self, family, and possessions. The love we have for Him should be unique,

leading us to worship. When we give Him the proper love, then our love for others and temporary possessions will fall into its proper place.

- B. Jesus Christ asserts that a true believer is a disciple who, by constant learning and devotion, loses himself for the sake of his glorious Savior (Matt. 16:14-28; Mark 8:34-9:1; Luke 9:23-27). The joy of the believer, however, is proportionate to his obedience to Christ.

## **SALVATION IS LIKE VEGETATION**

Key Verse: Mark 4:26

### **I. In the parable of the Growing Seed (found only in Mark 4:26-29), Jesus compared salvation to vegetation.**

- A. Just as God created the world without man's assistance, He established the kingdom of God in the hearts of His people (Luke 17:20, 21) through the coming of His Son, Jesus Christ (Matt. 3:2).
- B. God has chosen, however, to appoint men as His coworkers in both the physical and spiritual realms. In agriculture the farmer sows the seed and then waits for growth to occur.
- C. Likewise, in the spiritual sphere, we are to speak and demonstrate the Word of God (Luke 8:11) to those around us. Then we must wait for God to work in their lives (1 Cor. 3:6, 7).
- D. Just as the power of life and growth is in the seed, so also is it in the Word of God. Man, only assists in the process by disseminating God's truth abroad, just as a farmer casts the seed.

### **II. After sowing the seed, the man in the parable left the matter in God's hands.**

- A. Instead of staying up all night worrying about it, he went about his business as usual (v. 27). In spiritual matters we should not fret either but allow the Holy Spirit to do His work.
- B. During this time "the seed springs up and grows up and he does not know how it takes place." The man could observe but not explain what God accomplished in the growth of the seed.
  - 1. The Greek verb translated "spring" is *blastàne*, germinate, from the noun *blastòs*, which means "germ." A man-made seed will never germinate. However, "the Word of God is quick [*zòn*, 'living'], and powerful [*energès*, 'energizing'] . . ." (Heb. 4:12) as opposed to man's wisdom, which never will give rise to spiritual life.



2. “Grow up” in Greek is *mèkunetai*, which means “lengthen.” Again, this action is of God, not man. The farmer is careful not to disturb the growth of a tender young shoot. Likewise, we should not try to hasten maturity in a young believer. He is equally fragile.
- C. The stages in the growth of the plant have been determined by God and occur automatically: “First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear: (Mark 4:28). Spiritual growth also follows a preordained pattern which we cannot change.

### **III. Finally, the farmer harvested the fruit.**

- A. After planting the seed and waiting patiently for God to make it mature into fruit, the farmer then harvested it at the opportune moment. (v. 29).
- B. Again, God calls us to action at the proper time. The faith which He has produced in a believer needs to be channeled in appropriate ways to benefit the body of Christ and contribute to its growth. Edifying each other in this manner (Eph. 4:16), we may be likened to the farmer who reaps the harvest and then makes it into nourishment for himself and others.

## **THE TRINITY AND THE NEW BIRTH**

Key Verse: John 3:16

### **I. The story of Nicodemus reveals Christ’s divinity.**

- A. Nicodemus believed Jesus to be only a teacher (John 3:2) who had, nevertheless, exhibited some signs of divinity.
  1. He conceded that God (*ho Theòs*), Jehovah of the Old Testament, must be with Him.
  2. The question he asked himself as he came to visit Jesus was: “Is it possible that Jesus is more than a man?”
- B. Jesus immediately confounded Nicodemus by exposing his ignorance of spiritual matters. In this way, He revealed His true divinity to Nicodemus.
  1. “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God; (John 3:3). By these words Jesus indicated that Nicodemus had a need which is common to all men. He showed that only God could fill that void and that He (Jesus) possesses the spiritual insight that Nicodemus lacked (John 3:12).
  2. In verse thirteen Jesus made an even greater revelation about himself: “And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from

heaven [‘came down’ is aorist participle, indicating the historical moment during which He was conceived through the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18, 20)], even the Son of man which is in heaven.” Jesus was referring to Himself, of course, who was simultaneously on earth and in heaven. What is translated, “which is” should rather be “the one being” (*ho òn*), as in John 1:18. Jesus was declaring that although the incarnation brought Him down to earth, He never ceased being the God of heaven as well.

## **II. A man can only be united to God through the action of the Holy Spirit.**

- A. Nicodemus revealed his ignorance of this fact in verse four, “. . . How can a man be born again when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” Nicodemus did not understand the role of the Holy Spirit in uniting a man with God.
- B. Jesus explained that there are two births: the physical and the spiritual “That which is born of the flesh [out of the water] is flesh [physical]; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit [spiritual].”
- C. The physical birth of a child involves two human beings, but it is not so with the conception of the Lord Jesus as man. He was born of a woman (Gal. 4:4) through the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). Thus, He had man’s nature, but without sin (Heb. 4:15), and God’s nature combined. He was truly the God-Man perfect God and perfect Man.
- D. Likewise, when a man is born from above, the Holy Spirit is equally involved in converting a sinner into a saint. Although the person continues to be fully man, he also acquires the nature of God (2 Pet. 1:4). As there are two natures in Christ the God-Man, there are two natures in the believer (only Christ, however, was without sin). This spiritual regeneration is only possible for those who first come out of water (a reference to physical birth not water baptism [v. 5]). Pure spiritual beings such as angels are never said to possess or need “the birth from above.” It is sinful men that require the new birth.
- E. The Holy Spirit must be God come down from heaven. Like Jesus (v. 13), in order to have the ability to cause such a spiritual transformation.
- F. Jesus also likened the Holy Spirit to the blowing wind: a real presence that cannot be contained. A person knows he is born from above, but he cannot explain or control how the experience took place. Nicodemus was right in expressing wonder. “How can these things be?” (v. 9). Later verses indicate that he too experienced the new birth (John 19:38-42).

## **III. God the Father is also involved in the birth from above.**

- A. When Nicodemus referred to God, he was thinking of Jehovah of the Old Testament. He did not realize that Jesus and the Holy Spirit were the other two Persons of the Triune God.
- B. In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus revealed the Trinity. He spoke of God the Father as having loved the world so much that He sent His Son, the second

Person of the Trinity, “. . . that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). He reiterated this truth in verse seventeen, “For God [*ho Theòs*, ‘God the Father’] sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” Thus, it is God the Father who sent the Son to save the world. God the Holy Spirit effects this salvation in each individual believer’s life through the new birth.

## **GOD’S SPIRIT IN CONTROL OF OUR LIVES**

Key Verse: Romans 8:14

### **I. What is the test of a born-again believer?**

- A. One is not marked as a believer by a mere profession of faith, but rather by being indwelt and led by God’s Spirit (Rom. 8:11, 14). We are told that the Holy Spirit dwells in us as believers in Christ (Rom. 8:9-11). Paul uses this same idea when he speaks of our being “sealed” by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). We are consequently led by Him (Rom. 8:14).
- B. In Romans 7:17, Paul uses the same words (*oikò en*, “dwell in”) to refer to sin dwelling in him as when he speaks of the Spirit dwelling in him (Rom. 8:9). Therefore, Paul is saying that his sinful nature has not been eradicated by the entrance of the Holy Spirit into his life.
- C. Paul desires to serve the indwelling Spirit instead of the sinful flesh which struggled against this (Rom. 7:22, 23).
- D. If he had been led by his old nature, one could question whether he were truly saved. This is confirmed by Romans 8:11, “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” The verb for “quicken” is *zòpoiesei*, “shall make alive.” Once we have come to possess spiritual life by means of the implanted Spirit, or after having been “born again” (John 3:3), it is impossible for the dead flesh to rule over the live Spirit on a permanent basis (1 John 3:6).

### **II. The born-again believer has a responsibility to follow the Spirit.**

- A. The Lord does not produce in us a static, dormant stupor when the Spirit enters. In fact, just the opposite occurs; we are immediately called into active combat.
- B. “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh” (Rom. 8:12). The expression, “we are debtors” indicates that we are under obligation to God. Because we personally did nothing to merit the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we are indebted to God for His presence in our lives. The way we repay God for His grace is to follow after the Spirit and not the flesh.

### III. There are inevitable consequences of our lifestyles.

- A. Paul declares in Romans 8:13, 14 that our way of life clearly demonstrates whether we have been born again into God's family.
- B. "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die" (Rom. 8:13). Such a person clearly does not have the Spirit in him and will be eternally separated from God, no matter what profession of faith he makes. He is excluded because his life yields the fruits of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21).
- C. Those who follow the Spirit, on the other hand grow from the immature state of childhood (*tèkna*, "children" [John 1:12]) to the maturity of sonship (*huiòi*, "sons" [Rom. 8:14]), who as grown-ups voluntarily conform to Jesus Christ. Their conformity to Christ confirms that they were indeed born again and are "joint-heirs" with Christ. In Romans 8:16 the word "children" is used: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children [*tèkna*] of God." *Tèknon* means "one born," thus, it refers to the new birth (John 1:12). Afterwards, however, comes the maturation process. This growth into sonship is achieved by means of obedience to the Holy Spirit in our lives (Rom. 8:14) and God's will for us (Eph. 2:10).

## VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION

Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 10:13

### I. How is temptation presented in the New Testament?

- A. The word in Greek is *peirasmòs* derived from *peìra*, "experience" (Heb. 11:19, 36). The verb is *peìro*, to pierce through with a weapon or spear." Intransitively it means "to pass through." As a verb, *peìro* does not occur in the New Testament, but the verb *peiràzo*, to tempt," is used with the following meaning.
  - 1. To try, to prove in a good sense (John 6:6; 2 Cor. 13:5; Heb. 11:17) or a bad sense (Matt. 16:1; 22:18, 35; 1 Cor. 10:9).
  - 2. To Tempt by soliciting to sin (Matt. 4:1; 1 Thess. 3:5; James 1:13, 14)
    - a) In this sense we have Satan called "the tempter" (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5). Satan tries to prove one has been evil.
      - (1) Satan has a particular interest in discrediting believers.
      - (2) He tries to entangle us in sin, and thereby prove us to be Sinful. His temptation, if not resisted, causes us to do that which we know is contrary to God's will.
    - b) Satan's temptation is always for the purpose of causing us to fail.

- (1) He wants to confuse believers and cause them to stumble; if we mistakenly believe that salvation leads to sinlessness, this will prove to us that we are not what we believe God made us to be.
  - (2) Satan further intends that any failures on our part will lead us to think that God is powerless to meet our needs. He desires us to forget that any failure comes from our refusal to meet God's conditions, and not from any limitation on God's part.
3. Temptation is said to be initiated by God in several Scriptures. This is temptation in the sense of testing.
  - a) God uses testing to prove what He made us to be and give us the satisfaction of victory. When God tempts us, it is for the purpose of proving us in order to promote us.
  - b) This use of temptation is equivalent to testing a child – it is not for the purpose of preparing him to receive more advanced knowledge.
- B. Why did the Lord teach us to pray that God would not lead us into temptation?
  1. The word for “lead” is *eisenègks* meaning “bring us into.” In other words we should pray, “Do not lead us into a path which will allow us to be tempted by the devil.”
  2. It is acknowledgement of our weakness in handling Satan. Jesus knows that we are better off resisting the devil so that he will flee from us (James 4:7). When it comes to Satan we must humbly confess we cannot handle him on our own.
- C. But how can we account for the statements in James 1:12-15?
  1. “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation” (James 1:12)
    - a) “Blessed” is *makàrios* which means “indwelt by God, and because of it, fully satisfied.” A person “blessed” in this sense will not be overcome by any testing which God permits or directs. Such testing for them leads to demonstrating that they are approved before God.
    - b) This is *dokimè*, “testing in the positive sense.” The second part of the verse makes it clear: “For when he [the blessed person] is tried, he shall receive the crown of life.”
  2. God does not tempt us to cause us to sin. Only Satan or our lustful desires do that. Hence the statement:
    - a) “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (James 1:13).
    - b) God does not tempt (test) us to give us an opportunity to sin, but to give us an opportunity to show ourselves approved. Our adamic nature causes us to misunderstand God's purpose in the circumstances He permits us to go through.

## II. What is the temptation “common to man” (1 Cor. 10:13)?

- A. James acknowledges that temptation to sin springs from within our Adamic nature (James 1:14).
- B. Paul acknowledges that temptation which may result in sin may also be due to temptation surrounding us. This is the temptation “common to man.” In Greek it is *anthòpinos*, “human, pertaining to man,” as long as we are human beings living in an unredeemed creation (Rom. 8:19-25), we shall experience human temptations.
- C. Such temptations pursue us.
  - 1. We should not pursue them
  - 2. We must not flirt with temptation
  - 3. The verb “hath taken,” *eìlephen* in Greek, is the active voice of *Lambàno*, “to take, to reach us and take hold of us.” This means that temptation is in pursuit of the saint who is on the move for God.
- D. Such temptation pertaining to our humanity is never beyond our strength to bear and overcome. God will not allow us to be tempted beyond our strength.
- E. God is faithful, *pistòs*, “dependable.” He will give us the strength to overcome. We cannot do it on our own
- F. Such temptations are not caused by God directly, but they are part and parcel of our temptable yet unredeemed bodies and the unredeemed creation. They are the result of Adam’s sin, and yet God promises victory as we experience the temptations of our fallen humanity.
- G. He promises “a way of escape.” The Greek word is *èkbasis* which occurs only here in 1 Corinthians 10:13 and Hebrews 13:7. It is derived from the preposition *ek*, “out of,” and *baino*, “to go, proceed.” It refers to what is to come out of a certain situation. It actually does not mean a way of escape, if by that we are to understand it as merely getting out of a situation, but rather it means that something is going to come out of it, that God in His faithful dependability is going to enrich our experience by any situation that tempts us. God never permits anything in our lives without a purposeful end (Rom. 8:28).
- H. Knowing this makes every temptation involved in our humanity bearable as the last phase states: “that ye may be able to bear it.”

## CHRIST MAKES US NEW CREATURES

Key Verse: 2 Corinthians 5:17

### I. What is the natural man like?

- A. The natural man does not perceive God (Rom. 8:7)
- B. Consequently, he cannot please God (Rom. 8:8).

### II. It is Christ who makes the difference.

- A. Christ must actually indwell us (John 17:23, 26; Rom. 8:10; Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27)
- B. It is only when Christ is in us that we become acceptable to God (Rom. 8:1; 1 Cor. 1:30).
- C. In this state, nothing can separate us from God's love (Rom. 8:38, 39).

### III. Christ enters us because of our faith in Him

- A. Christ and the prophets before Him proclaimed that He was the way to salvation (Is. 53:11; Matt. 3:11; John 5:24; 10:9; 11:25; 14:6).
- B. The apostles also preached salvation through faith in Christ alone (Rom. 10:8-11; Eph. 2:8).

### IV. Those in Christ are changed people.

- A. Paul used the Greek word *kainè* which means qualitatively new (2 Cor. 5:17). No one can be in Christ without being radically changed.
- B. This change is also called *katallagè*, "reconciliation" (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18-20). We change from being an enemy of God to becoming a friend (Rom. 5:10).
- C. The old nature is being "crucified" or put to death (Rom. 6:6).
- D. Likewise, John says, "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not . . ." (1 John 3:6). The verb is in the durative present, meaning habitually. However, if we commit a single sin (*hamàrte*), "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

### V. "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

- A. The word used for "old" is *archaea*, "original," and not simply *palaià*, "old." Original sin has been done away with by Christ's death on the cross (Heb. 10:10).
- B. The verb "passed away" is *parèlthen*, meaning "gone forever."
- C. Then the exclamation "behold" indicates surprise and delight at the total change which has taken place in the believer.
- D. "All things are become new." The verb *gègonen* is in the perfect tense which indicates that things not only became new in the past but continues to become new in the present.

- E. Furthermore, the change is all-inclusive (*tà pànta*), each individual thing and all of them collectively become new in the life of the Christian as he sees things in relation to Jesus as his Savior and Lord.

## HOW TO WALK AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT

Key Verse: Ephesians 5:8

### I. We are to realize the change produced in us when we turned to Christ (Eph. 5:8)

- A. “Ye were sometime in darkness.” The word *skòtos* is used metaphorically here. The other two words for darkness, *skòtia*, “the result of darkness” and *zòphos*, “thick darkness, the gloom of the underworld”), are used, as in Hebrews 12:18; 2 Peter 2:4, 17, and Jude 1:6, 13.
1. In the Old Testament, darkness is used to depict man’s moral depravity (Prov. 2:13; Is. 5:20; 60:2) and in the New Testament it is the emblem of sin as a state of spiritual ignorance (Matt 4:16; 6:23; Luke 1:79; 11:35; 22:53; John 1:5; 3:19; 8:12; 12:35, 46; Acts 26:18; Rom 2:19; 13:12; 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:8, 11; 6:12; Col. 1:13; 1 Thess 5:4, 5; 1 Pet. 2:9; 1 John 1:5, 6; 2:8, 9, 11).
  2. Darkness also stands for the desolation of divine punishment (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; 2 Pet. 2:17; Jude 1:6, 13). When Paul says “you were in darkness,” he means not only that they were in sin, but that they were worthy of punishment because of it.
- B. Paul urges us to realize what we are now.
1. “But now are ye light in the Lord” (Eph. 5:8). A look at the past helps us to understand the difference Christ has made in our lives as we compare our former sinful desires to our regenerated heart (1 Pet. 2:9; 1 John 2:8).
  2. What precisely does it mean to be in the light?
    - a) Light in the Old Testament often denotes a state of life as opposed to death (Job 33:28, 30; Ps. 56:13).
    - b) Light portrays the salvation and blessing which God gives to his people (Ps 4:6; 27:1; 36:9; 43:3; Is. 10:17; Mic 7:8; Acts 26:18). In Hebrews *phòtisthèntes*, or “enlightened ones,” denotes those who had the experience of salvation (Heb: 6:4; 10:32).
    - c) Light also symbolizes moral purity. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5), where darkness represents sin (1 Thess 5:5)



## II. Being in the light involves moral responsibilities and opportunities.

- A. Our responsibilities are expressed as a command to “Walk as children of light.”
1. Walking is commonly used as a figure of speech for Christian conduct (Rom 6:4; 2 Cor. 5:7).
  2. Walking indicates forward motion. The Christian standard is not attained at once (Phil. 3:12).
  3. There is a certain destination and predetermined road that those who are light ought to follow.
    - a) The Greek word which is translated “walk” is *stoichèo* from *stoichòs*, “a row” (Acts 21:24; Rom. 4:12; Gal 5:25; 6:16; Phil. 3:16). It means to advance in rows, in an orderly fashion as opposed to the verb *peripatèo*, which means “to walk about.”
    - b) The word *stoichèo* is also used in Galatians 5:25, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk [*stoichòmen*] in the Spirit.” It is the Spirit who indicates the pathway we should follow. In Galatians 6:16 Paul says: “And as many as walk [*stoichèsousin*] according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy . . .” In Philippians 3:16 he also declares “. . . let us walk [*stoicheîn*] by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.”
  4. In the Christian life there must be rules and thoughts common to all Christians. If we find ourselves all alone doing whatever we wish, there may be shadow obscuring our light.
- B. Fulfilling our responsibility to walk in the light of God’s Word gives us the opportunity to produce the fruit of the spirit.
1. Fruitfulness is what the Lord desires from our walk in Him as shown in the parable of the wicked vinedressers (Matt. 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19), the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11-27), and the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30).
  2. Metaphorically, believers are the ground which brings forth fruit according to the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:19ff.; Mark 4:15ff.; Luke 8:12ff.). We are also the branches which bear fruit as we abide in the Vine (John 15:5), the grain of wheat which brings forth fruit if it dies (John 12:24), and the trees which are known by their fruit (Matt. 7:19, 20).
  3. Both in Ephesians 5:9 and Galatians 5:22 we have the word *karpòs*, “fruit,” in the singular and not in the plural. It is a quality of life that is spoken of here as being fruitful in contrast to individual good deeds.
    - a) Such a mind-set will in turn manifest the fruit of light as enumerated in Ephesians 5:9: “all kinds of goodness [*agathòsunè*,

‘benevolence’] and righteousness [*dikaìosùne*, ‘rendering to God His rights’] and truth [as opposed to lying].”

- b) Paul lists additional fruit in Galatians 5:22, 23: love (*agape*, “unselfishly meeting the needs of others”); joy (*charà*, “rejoicing no matter what the circumstances”; see 2 Cor. 7:4; Col. 1:11, 24; 1 Thess. 1:6; James 1:2; 1 Pet. 4:13); peace (*eirènè*, “tranquility in spite of the opposing forces we experience in the world”); longsuffering (*makrethumìa*, “patience toward people”); gentleness (*chrèstòtès*, benevolence”); faith (*pìstis*, “trusting God when circumstances tempt us to give up”); meekness (*praòtès*, “active opposition to evil”); and temperance (*egkràteia*, “self-control”).

### III. Being in the light involves constantly testing ourselves.

- A. On the positive side, Paul calls this “proving what is acceptable unto the Lord” (Eph. 5:10).
  - 1. The word *dokimàzontes* means “testing, putting something to trial, to judge whether it is fir and proper.”
  - 2. As Christians, it is possible to act without proper discretion or what James calls “the wisdom that is from above” (James 3:17). Christ also warned us against “throwing our pearls before swine” (Matt. 7:6).
  - 3. On the negative side, we are instructed to “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11).
    - 1. The children of darkness sometimes have works more vigorous and persistent than the children of light, but their works will not last.
      - a) What are the poisonous products of darkness? The works of the flesh are listed in Galatians 5:19-21, “adultery, fornication, uncleanness [spiritually], lasciviousness [*asèlgeia*, ‘readiness for as much pleasure as possible’], idolatry ‘elevating anybody or anything to the status of deity’] witchcraft [which includes drug addiction]; hatred, variance [quarrelings], emulations [jealousies], wrath [outbursts of passionate anger], strife [party factions arising from selfish ambition], seditions [dissentions and discords], heresies [introduction of false beliefs], envyings [desiring evil upon others], murders, drunkenness, revelings [feasting and carousing].”
      - b) Paul also lists similar deeds of darkness in Colossians 3:5-9. A Christian cannot participate in any of these things without adversely affecting the light of his witness.

2. The Bible assures us that the fruits of darkness will be destroyed.
    - a) Paul expresses this in Romans 6:21, “What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.”
    - b) In Romans 7:5 he describes the unregenerate life as producing fruit “unto death.”
    - c) When Paul speaks of the works of darkness as being unfruitful, he means that they cannot feed the soul or spirit of man. They simply satisfy the senses and will quickly fade away. Only what is done for Christ will last forever (1 Cor. 3:11-15).
  3. The very nature of a genuine Christian as light will expose and judge the works of darkness (John 3:20; Eph. 5:13).
  4. To have fellowship with, to share in what is useless and temporary is to deny the eternal life we have in Christ.
- C. The proper exercise of this testing will make us true “followers of God, as dear children” (Eph. 5:1).

## **GUIDELINES FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

Key Verse: Philippians 4:8

### **I. The Christians in Philippi came out of a heathen environment.**

- A. Most of those who lived in Philippi practiced ways of life which were totally unacceptable for a Christian.
- B. Other actions were not bad in themselves, but the motivation behind them was wrong. For instance, in heathendom, stealing may have been avoided because of the severe punishment one would receive if caught. Although the resulting behavior may be the same as that espoused by Christianity, the Christian is motivated by a desire to please Christ, not merely to avoid punishment. In a similar manner, Christians today live in a society which contains many heathen practices. We must be as diligent to avoid evil as the early Christians were.

## II. The Christian must make a choice between his old lifestyle and the new one in Jesus Christ.

- A. In making our decision we must use one reason (Phil. 4:8). The translators have rendered the present indicative *logìzomai* in Philippians 3:13, “Brethren, I count [*logìzomai*] not myself to have apprehended.” To translate this verb as simply “think” or “let the mind dwell” is inadequate. It really means using one’s mind to come to the right conclusion.
- B. The motives of our hearts must be pure. That element of the Christian’s conduct is indicated by the use of the relative pronoun *hòsa*, “whatever things,” referring to the qualities listed Philippians 4:8.
- C. Christian behavior is not an automatic result of salvation; it is learned by conscious practice an imitation, by conforming to His Word.
  - 1. “Those things, which ye have both learned . . .” (Phil. 4:9). The word for “learned” is *emàthete*. It refers to a lesson not only taught, but more importantly, learned.
  - 2. “Those things, which ye have both learned, and received. . . .” *Parelàbete* is the aorist indicative active of *paralambàno*, “to accept” (see 1 Cor.15:1, 3; Gal. 1:9). The Philippians had made Paul’s instructions a part of their own way of life.
  - 3. “Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me. . . .” Paul was not only their teacher but also their example since he practiced what he preached to them.
  - 4. “Those things . . . do.” Actually, the antecedents of the plural demonstrative pronoun *taùta*, “those things,” are the things listed in verse eight using the relative pronoun *hòsa*, “whatever things.” The verb “do” is *pràssete*, the present imperative of *pràssō*, expressing an action as continued or not yet completed. Thus, we are urged to continue behavior as Christians in our daily lives in order to show the world that Christ lives within us (Phil. 1:21).

## III. The Apostle Paul give us general guidelines on which to base our actions.

- A. “. . . Whatsoever things are true . . .” (Phil. 4:8). The word for “true” is *alèthè*, meaning “sincere, genuine, and not fake” (see 1 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:18). When our thoughts are centered upon things that are genuine, our actions will not be hypocritical.
- B. “. . . Whatsoever things are honest. . . .” The Greek for “honest” is *semnà*. This adjective was used of certain Greek gods and goddesses who were considered worthy of reverence and worship. Used here to modify “things” it means “dignified” or “causing respect.”

- C. “. . . Whatsoever things are just. . .” There is man’s righteousness (Matt. 4:20) and God’s righteousness. It is necessary to search the Scriptures to find out what is right and acceptable to God.
- D. “. . . Whatsoever things are pure. . .” The Greek word here is *hagnà*, which means “chaste, freedom from defilement or impurities” (2 Cor. 11:2; 1 Tim. 5:22; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet.3:2; 1 John 3:3). It could also refer to purity from sexual defilement (2 Cor. 11:2).
- E. “. . . Whatsoever things are lovely. . .” The word *prospheless* is unique to this passage and is derived from the preposition *pros*, “to,” and *philos*, “friend,” or *philèo*, “to love or befriend.” The best rendering would be “endearing things.” What we think and do then should endear us to God and others.
- F. “. . . Whatsoever things are of good report. . .” The *euphèma* is used only here. It is derived from *eu*, “good” and *phèmè*, “fame,” which is from the verb *phèmi*, “speak or make known.” Thus, we should concentrate on things which are well-spoken of.
- G. The two items which follow this list in Philippians 4:8 are in the singular: “. . . if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise. . .” The word for “virtue” is *arèskò*, “to please.” Aristotle spoke of *aretè* as the middle ground between two extremes. How important it is for a Christian to take a balanced view of life according to Scripture. Secondly, the word for “praise” is *èpeinos* (Phil. 1:11), from *epì*, “upon,” and *àinos*, “praise” (Matt. 21:16; Luke 18:43). The compound noun *èpainos* means that which deserves praise. Any praiseworthy object in God’s eyes is worthy of our consideration.

#### IV. The reward for living in a Christian manner is the presence of God in our lives.

The last phrase of verse nine, “. . . and the God of peace shall be with you” should rather say “. . . then the God. . .” We shall have not only the peace of God, but also the God from whom peace emanates as our constant companion. A Holy God does not like to keep company with unholy people who unworthily carry the name of His Son, Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX D

FOUR SERMON TOPIC SUGGESTIONS

Retrieved from: <https://dvnconnect.org/resources/sermon-notes-on-domestic-violence/>

**i. NO More Silence**

Proposition: The power of domestic violence and sexual assault to impact our communities is strengthened when good people remain silent.

**ii. NO MORE Shame**

Proposition: Those experiencing domestic violence often feel shame and blame themselves for abuse. As faith communities, we should commit to showing compassion.

**iii. NO MORE Abuse of Scripture**

Proposition: It is especially disturbing to people of faith when the Bible is twisted and misconstrued to justify wicked behavior or abuse.

**iv. NO MORE Complacency:**

Proposition: As people of faith, what can we do? How do we support those among us who are or have experienced violence?

APPENDIX E  
SIX SERMON MANUSCRIPTS

*Troubling Texts: Domestic Violence in the Bible*

*RETRIEVED FROM:* <https://sojo.net/articles/troubling-texts-domestic-violence-bible/>

**JOB KNEW WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO FEEL TRAPPED**

The story of Job is one of the literary classics in the Bible. It is a story that tries to sort out why bad things happen to good people. It is a story that tries to make sense out of suffering. It is a story that concludes with an epic confrontation between Job and God. And it is a story that captures the isolation, the misunderstanding, and the feelings of abandonment.

Job's friends and his wife are convinced that it is Job's sin that has led to his misfortunes. That has a familiar ring to people trapped in violent and abusive relationships. "Why did you make him mad?" friends ask. "Why don't you just leave?"

And inside the relationship, the abuser often threatens even greater harm if the victim tells anyone about what is happening. And if the victim decides to leave, the risk of violence increases, often with lethal consequences.

As Job said of God, "If I go forward, he is not there; or backward, I cannot perceive him; on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him; I turn to the right, but I cannot see him...If only I could vanish in darkness and thick darkness would cover my face!" (Job 23:8-9, 17)

Victims of domestic violence – both women and men as well as children – often feel isolated, abandoned by family and friends who are uncomfortable or afraid of the topic, trapped

by religious traditions that stress male dominance and the indissolubility of marriage and feel forgotten by God. Job knew that feeling. I have spent quite a bit of time over the past few years dealing with issues of domestic violence, particularly with the role that faith communities can play in creating safe spaces and engaging the wider community in changing the cultural norms around domestic violence.

It seems to me that we in church communities have a special role in addressing domestic violence. In far too many churches, abusers justify their violence by saying that wives were supposed to submit to their husbands. They apparently missed the next verse in the letter to the Colossians that says, “Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly” (3:19).

The value that churches place on the sanctity of marriage can blind people to the undermining of marriage by violence. Even the Catholic bishops – no slouches when it comes to defending marriage – have said very clearly in a 2002 **statement** two important things: “As bishops, we condemn the use of the Bible to support abusive behavior in any form... We emphasize that no person is expected to stay in an abusive marriage.”

Churches can trap victims by talking about the imperative of forgiveness and the deeper meaning of suffering. Both forgiveness and suffering are important concepts in our lives but should never be used to get in the way of seeking safety.

Let’s go back to Job for a minute. His life had taken a very bad turn. He tried to maintain his faith in God, but it got harder and harder. Finally, he launches a powerful rant to God. He does not suffer in silence. He demands answers.



Elie Wiesel, the great Jewish writer who survived the Holocaust and knew at the core of his being what it is to suffer, wrote in his **reflection on the story of Job**: “Once upon a time in a far-away land, there lived a legendary man, a just and generous man who, in his solitude and despair, found the courage to stand up to God. And to force Him to look at His creation.”

People who feel abandoned by God, whether because of domestic violence or any other reason, completely have the right to rant at God. And they have the right to expect that those of us who call ourselves Christians will be there to be the face of God, the hands of God in their lives. That’s what Jesus was talking about in the story from **Mark 10:35-45**. It’s a conversation about both power and service.

Power is absolutely central when thinking about issues of domestic violence. People who abuse and batter their partners are not simply losing their tempers. They are not simply having a bad day. They are seeking to exercise power and control over someone with whom they should be having a loving relationship.

Remember those famous words from the apostle Paul? “Love is patient, love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

Any one of us who have been in long-term loving relationships know that there are days we are better at living that way than others. But people who physically and emotionally abuse their partners are not just having a bad day. They are using whatever tactics or weapons they have available—coercion and threats, intimidation or isolation, economic abuse or using children—to exercise power and control over their partner.

None of these show up in Paul's list of what it means to be loving. None of these can be condoned by a faith community that claims to follow Jesus. None of these can be condoned by the wider society that seeks equity and justice.

Fortunately, in faith communities and in wider society, the attitudes are changing, but only in increments. Professional football has become the litmus test for how our nation is dealing with domestic violence. Last year, it was **Ray Rice** from the Baltimore Ravens, notoriously knocking out his fiancé in an elevator. He is not playing pro football this season – at least not so far. Last year, Greg Hardy played for the Carolina Panthers, but missed most of the season after being convicted of assaulting his former girlfriend.

Scott Simon on **NPR** described what happened: “Greg Hardy’s former girlfriend testified that the 6-foot-4, 279 pounds NFL franchise player threw her into a bathtub, dragged her by her hair, hurled her onto a futon covered with weapons, and locked his hands around her throat.” But that’s only part of the story. Hardy and the woman reached an out-of-court settlement and the conviction was dropped. So, the Dallas Cowboys signed him over the off-season, and now he is playing professional football again as if nothing happened.

**Terry Bradshaw**, a former star quarterback and now a commentator on ESPN, minced no words in stating: “Anybody, in my opinion, that lays a hand on a woman — I don’t care who you are, my friend — you never come back in this league.” The NFL is making some noise about domestic violence. But **Scott Simon** reminds us of these facts: “This year alone, 6 NFL players have been arrested for domestic violence and 1 for sexual battery.”

And athletes still are considered role models. They are looking for those seats of glory in our world. So now back to the story of Jesus in the **gospel of Mark**.

James and John, Zebedee's sons, wanted seats of glory with Jesus. So, Jesus then asks, can you live the way I am living, can you die the way I am going to die? Sure, they answer. And the other 10 disciples start getting jealous. How come James and John get the good seats? They whine, sort of missing the whole point of what Jesus had just said.

This is not a power game, he tells them. It's not about exerting power and control over others. "Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant...the Human One (that's Jesus) didn't come to be served but rather to serve and to give his life to liberate many people" (Mark 10:43,45).

There's the challenge to us as a community and as individuals. We are called to speak up and to reach out. We are called to speak up so those trapped in violent relationships know that they are not alone, so that perpetrators of violence know that they will have no defense in this sanctuary, and so that the nation knows that the days of tolerating violence within relationships is over.

And we are called to reach out so that those hoping for a safer place for themselves and their children know there are people with them on that journey—that they can experience the love of God in the hands that reach out to them in their moments of need.

## **WHEN GOD TELLS A WOMAN TO RETURN TO HER ABUSER**

Slavery. Forced marriage. Surrogacy without consent. It's no wonder I never heard the **story of Hagar** growing up in church! Now it's one I often turn to in my advocacy work for gender justice, because it speaks to the experiences of countless women and girls today whose lives are ravaged by domestic violence, labor trafficking, child marriage, sexual slavery, and other abuses.

When the story begins in Genesis 16, Sarai and Abram have been struggling with infertility for a decade. But Sarai sees a solution: she will have Abram take her slave Hagar "as a wife" (16:3), and she will become Sarai's surrogate. When Hagar becomes pregnant, however, Sarai does not feel relieved; she feels threatened. The scripture says that Hagar looked upon her mistress "with contempt" (16:5), but I've often thought that this verse reflects Sarai's insecurities about her infertility and her status as Abram's wife. I imagine Sarai finds Hagar's very being offensive.

Hagar's pregnancy is not the root cause of Sarai's anger; it is merely the trigger. If we turn back a **few chapters**, we'll recall that Sarai herself was a victim of sexual coercion. While she and Abram were in Egypt, her husband worried that being seen with Sarai was a liability. She was too beautiful, he explained (Genesis 12:11). Being married to her put his life in great danger because Pharaoh would become jealous once he saw them together. If she did not want him to die, she had to pretend that they were not, in fact, husband and wife, but that they were brother and sister. *If you love me, you'll do this for me.* What choice does Sarai have but to go along with Abram's lie?

I try to imagine the impact this abuse has on Sarai. First, she is unable to conceive children. Then she is abandoned by her husband and forced to marry Pharaoh (Genesis 12:15-19). If Abram could offer her up willingly to another man as if she were a commodity to be bought and sold, what purpose would she have in Abram's life if she cannot be the mother of his children? Feeling powerless over her own body and life, Sarai yields what little sense of control she does have against Hagar, the only one inferior to her. The abused becomes the abuser, and the cycle of violence continues.

When the abuse escalates, Hagar escapes into the wilderness and heads back to her home in Egypt. Even though she is pregnant and vulnerable to any number of dangers, Hagar risks everything in search of freedom. While on her journey home, an angel of the Lord appears to her and asks where she is going. When she explains her situation, the angel tells her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her" (Genesis 16:9). These words baffle me. Return? Isn't this the part when God is supposed to bring deliverance? What sense can be made of this? How do we cope with a story in our sacred text in which God instructs a woman to go back to a situation of abuse?

When I reach this part of the story, I have two knee-jerk reactions. First, I try to find a way to explain it. Perhaps God knew that more dangers awaited her in Egypt, and that returning to the house of Sarai and Abram would spare her even more violence. But this explanation feels rather trite and dismissive.

Second, I try to turn quickly to the next few verses when the angel promises Hagar that she will survive the experience and that her son will grow up (Genesis 16:10-12). Yes, Hagar has to return, but she is not without hope, right? When I step back, I realize that both of these

responses are rooted in my deep discomfort with the reality that God would tell Hagar to go back to her abuser.

“Return to your mistress and submit to her” (Genesis 16:9). The angel’s words remind me of many stories I’ve heard from survivors of domestic violence. When they confided in a pastor about the abuse, the pastor told them that they needed to stay in their marriages despite the violence done to them. “Return to your abuser and submit to him.”

When we encounter situations or texts beyond our comprehension, we yearn to make sense of them somehow because sitting in the discomfort of not knowing is painful. We read a biblical story of abuse and we exclaim, “That was another time! That was a different culture!” Similarly, when we encounter a survivor of domestic violence, we tend to wonder what she did to make her abuser angry or why she can’t find a way to escape. In our efforts to make sense of these experiences, we do and say things that harm those who most need our support and love.

Hagar calls God *El-roi*, “the God who sees” (Genesis 16:13a). Today God is calling us to be the church that sees the sacred worth of those struggling to escape situations of abuse. When we read Hagar’s story, we have an important opportunity to reflect on and better understand the disturbing realities of domestic abuse—that for those whose lives are wracked by violence, bringing an end to the cycle of abuse is never simple or easy.

As we imagine Hagar’s pain as she makes the journey back to her abuser’s home, we can practice the sacraments of presence and compassion in the face of injustice. With open eyes and open hearts, we can work toward a more just, peaceful world for every child of God.

## **CAN EHPESIANS 5 MAKE ABUSE SEEM NORMAL?**

*“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.*

When Ephesians 5:21-24 is heard in faith communities, it is often met with trepidation. Traditionally, the text has been used to justify male dominance over women. At worst, it has been used to grant Christian endorsement of marital rape and intimate partner violence — ranging from emotional and psychological abuse to physical violence.

Intimate partner violence is a pervasive problem in our society. Moreover, while intimate partner violence affects men in addition to women, it disproportionately victimizes women. According to the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**, as many as 47.1 percent of women experience at least one act of psychological aggression in their lifetime. This aggression can turn physically violent: 31.5 percent of women experience physical violence in their lifetime, while 22.3 percent of women are victimized at least once by a severe act of violence. Intimate partners also perpetrate sexual violence. About 8.8 percent of women are raped and another 15.8 percent are sexually victimized by a partner in their lifetime. Finally, 9.2 percent of women are stalked by a partner to the point of fearing for their physical safety.

Given this reality, it is important to recognize that at any given time members of our congregations are suffering various forms of abuse. Such experiences of violence and abuse, past and present, are part of the background that inform the messages that individuals take away from

Christian discussions of relationships and marriage — including reflections and sermons on Ephesians 5.

When Christians talk about the ideals of marriage, particularly when discussing Ephesians 5, we need to be sure that we are able to account for the *reality* of marriage. For many, far from being the context of mutuality and partnership, intimate relationships can be the most precarious and dangerous context for women. Indeed, perpetrators of violence and abuse are most typically those who are well-known, often romantic partners or spouses, rather than strangers.

Thankfully, increased awareness has led to a shift in the way this text is taught. At best, preachers advocate for mutual submission in marriage with an emphasis on equality and partnership. The text is read and preached, therefore, as compatible with contemporary ideals of companionate marriage.

When preachers emphasize that first line — “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” — they make clear the importance of challenging the gender hierarchy that justifies violence. Yet here, even at its best, preaching on this text may inadvertently communicate a message that is heard to implicitly endorse abusive patterns.

Indeed, it is critical to keep in mind that listeners — and readers — come to Ephesians 5:21-24, and to broader Christian ideals about relationship and marriage, with an entire personal history. This personal history is also informed by our broader cultural context and its ideas about gender and relationships. Specifically, we come to know ourselves, and interpret our



experiences, through messages we receive from our culture. This cultural background informs what individuals take away from teachings on Ephesians 5.

Interpretations of and preaching on Ephesians 5 may ultimately reinforce cultural messages that may foster gendered abuse and violence, unintentionally making them difficult to accurately recognize. In her book, *Flirting with Danger: Young Women's Reflections on Sexuality and Domination*, social psychologist Lynn Phillips examines the social messages about gender and relationships present in our culture that shape how women both understand and interpret their interactions with men, particularly as relating to sex and patterns of violence.

Although **Phillips' research** is based primarily on interviews with undergraduate women, her interviews led her to name several distinct messages about gender, relationships, and victimization that are also at play for married or partnered women. The first relevant message has to do with understanding social understandings of what makes a “good woman.” It holds that a “pleasing woman” is focused on her modesty and is selfless in relation to others. She is expected to tailor herself to male desires.

The next message holds that “normal” good men are easily distinguishable from deviant men, or those who abuse. This message makes it difficult for women to name abuse that is perpetrated by men with whom they have experiences of goodness.

Another message communicates that real victims are those who could not in any way prevent the physical violence they experienced. Unable to see male partners as deviant or one's own experiences as true victimization, women may understand the abuse they encounter as part of normal difficulty in a relationship.

The final two cultural messages further complicate the way that the previous messages come together in actual relationships. One maintains that mistreatment and disappointment are typical experiences for women. The other suggests that love is able to overcome whatever difficulties may arise. Both messages combine with those above to suggest that whatever pain occurs in a marriage, even victimization, is normal and can be overcome. Thus, experiences of intimate partner violence are supported by cultural messages that prevent us, and the women who experience them, from being able to recognize and reject the abuse in their own lives.

These messages may be influenced by the way that we hear the text from Ephesians 5. When we emphasize being “subject to one another,” it presupposes equality and mutuality as conditions of a modern companionate marriage. Yet, for women for whom this equality is not taken for granted, at least in practice, being told to be subject to another can have the negative consequence of reinforcing a culturally conditioned inequality. Rather than recognizing an abusive imbalance of power or abusive speech and actions, she may be encouraged to view the denial of her own needs — even to the point of health — and aggression and turmoil as typical parts of a good Christian marriage that can be overcome for the happiness of all, if she further negates her own needs for those of her partner and marriage.

This text can be particularly dangerous because it provides biblical — even divine — backing to cultural messages that foster victimization. For those who wish to wrestle with Ephesians 5:21-24 in our communities, how one emphasizes the first verse is critical. But if we are going to adequately meet the needs of those who suffer in our communities, we must also explicitly call out what a violation of mutual submission looks like.

### **Domestic Violence: Are the Children Safe?**

There are many reasons for divorces and one of them is domestic violence. It's true that there are women and men who experience domestic violence and never leave the marriage; they only want to cleave while others leave for their dear life. Domestic violence can be viewed as family violence but there are family members from whom we may rarely hear in these situations, namely children. Most certainly, domestic violence impacts the perpetrator and victim yet if there are children in the same space, they, too, will be affected. They, too, may even be beaten, battered, and bruised. This is the blues-inflected struggle of life.

**The book of Mark** focuses a lot on the suffering of Jesus. Pain seems to have some privilege in the way Mark preaches the gospel. He keeps it real. Mark is a truth-teller because even today many travels a trail of tears. The level of pain and the type of pain vary. But the honest truth is that life is not a bouquet of sweet-smelling roses. There are thorns and fractures. There is brokenness — broken bodies and relationships — so it is of no surprise per se when we see Jesus and the Pharisees engage in a conversation about marriage and divorce, topics that may heighten our awareness of human brokenness in our society. It's no secret that many marriages fail and end in divorce, whether they are people of faith or not.

Through this lens, it might not be a coincidence that directly following the teaching about marriage and divorce (vv.2-12) is a short story about how Jesus blesses children (vv.13-16). We can't avoid this literary connection that points to existential realities. Children are affected by divorce, not just the partners. Children may be torn between two parents, but one could also say that we, adults, may be prone to divorcing children, that is, separating from them and their needs,

neglecting their voice and place in the home or broader society, ignoring how they may be impacted by domestic violence.

**The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence states** that 1 out of 15 children are exposed to domestic violence and 90% of them are eyewitnesses to it. **Safe Horizon**, another organization aiding victims of domestic violence, states that more than 3 million children see domestic violence in the home. In general, we don't hear about the children's perspectives in these dire situations. Maybe they are to be seen and not heard. Maybe this shouldn't be surprising, though it still is, when in the Christian tradition God came into the world as a child. We don't usually hear the question, "Are the children safe?"

In the ancient setting of Mark, children of the Greco-Roman world were held in low esteem, which is why Jesus embraces them as a sign of his own self-identification with the least of these (**Mark 9:33-37**). The ostracizing of children is also pronounced in that though children are present throughout the gospel of Mark, we never hear their voice. That in and of itself is a form of violence, a tactic to silence young potential victims. Their bodies are there but we never hear from them. They may even be healed but they never speak ( **Mark 5:21-24, 35-43; 7:24-37; 9:14-27** ); they don't have a voice. They are silenced in Mark and in the discussion about domestic violence. We can barely hear any echo of this still small voice asking, "Are the children safe?"

There's so much more attention put on the husband and wife who are married and divorced, so much more attention on adults than on children. There are eleven verses on the adults' relationship issues (vv.2-12) and a measly four on Jesus and the children (vv.13-16). Even in this respect, children are short changed, and we see the domination of adulthood, though

all of us were children at some point in our lives. It's the ongoing neglect (what might be called 'the violence of neglect') of children and their needs.

The disciples don't care either because when "people were bringing the little children to [Jesus] in order that he might touch them," "the disciples spoke sternly to them." Sometimes, many times, followers of Jesus miss the mark too when it comes to the role of children in the world. To scold the people who bring children to Jesus for a blessing is a sign of how we can 'divorce' children. It's not enough that we never hear the voice of children, or that we sometimes get antsy if they make too much noise in a church service; the disciples have to scold the constructive attempt to bless others. The disciples prefer to keep the status quo and are happy with the way things are as long as they are not affected. Modern day disciples may even, in the name of God, encourage couples to stay in their abusive relationships, maintaining the same family system that hurts not only the couple but also their children. With this unholy maintenance, the bruising can continue.

However, Jesus is not in the bruising, but blessing business. Only in Mark is Jesus indignant with the disciples for hindering the little children and only in Mark does Jesus bless children. Jesus is a child advocate extraordinaire. He responds to his followers and says, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is too such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." He welcomes them and holds them up as models for the kingdom. He then goes one step further by resisting the societal fear of touching the lowly, and in our day, touching children because of all of the abuse scandals.

Jesus takes a risk and engages in redemptive action. "He took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them." He brought near those who were usually far off, even in

conversations about domestic violence. Jesus embraces the little ones who might be hurt through experiencing or seeing violence. One translation says Jesus “hugged the children.” If so, his hugging is a form of rebellion against a contemporary culture where touching can be viewed as sexual predatorial behavior, rather than a practice of faithful discipleship, following the welcoming way of Jesus.

Jesus was right. “Let the little children come,” even come to be a part of the notion of domestic violence because they, too, might be vulnerable victims. But like Jesus we don’t have to support the status quo. Rather, we can bring children closer to this conversation and to ourselves in order to raise our hand, not to bruise, but to give a benediction, a blessing over their lives. We can hug them, hold them, and love them, thereby embodying the way of Jesus, the real Safe Haven, more effectively.

### **WHEN THERE IS NO JUSTICE IN SCRIPTURE: THE RAPE OF TAMAR**

When I first read about the **rape of Tamar**, I was astonished. This tragic story of a beautiful princess — sexually violated by her half-brother and then betrayed by her powerful father — left me aghast. What could I do with this troubling tale, tucked among pages of scripture where I sought spiritual guidance?

Throughout my life in the church, I had never heard the name “Tamar.” No reference to this daughter of King David. No remembrance of her profound suffering and grief.

It's not an easy story to hear, especially within the biblical narrative of God's love and providential care for God's people. It's like a well-guarded family secret no one dares mention, as if it might swell into a crushing typhoon, leaving devastation in its wake. Following tradition, I hoped not to encounter Tamar's story again.

If shunning the ancient biblical story of Tamar is all too easy, avoiding news of unrelenting violence against women is becoming harder. In the U.S., about **one in four women** has been the victim of serious physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner. **Worldwide, the figure is nearly one in three.**

The statistics reflect devastating personal stories like those of Jessica Lenahan (formerly Jessica Gonzales), whose estranged, abusive husband abducted their three young daughters in violation of a restraining order. Despite her repeated pleas, police failed to intervene—until the man opened fire on the police department, police shot back and killed him, and the girls' slain bodies were found in his truck. Jessica's case went to the U.S. Supreme Court, which held that she had **no constitutional right to enforcement of the restraining order.**

As a human rights professional, I have long considered domestic violence the most ubiquitous human rights violation. Studies show that it occurs **across lines of nationality, culture, race, and class.** American Christian communities feel the impact, as indicated by the **testimony of survivors and ministers.**

As people of faith, we should not shrink from the difficult truth of this pervasive injustice that affects our communities. We should seek to confront the reality of the broken world in

which we participate and pray for opportunities to be part of Christ's redemptive work of healing and justice.

Why, then, when one-fourth of U.S. women suffers violent abuse at home, do we not see more Christian leaders joining the movement to end violence against women? Why do we **rarely (if ever) hear sermons** about domestic violence?

One humble beginning may simply be greater honesty about what we are witnessing — in our communities, the news, and in our sacred text. Confrontation with evil does not come easily, but it is a choice available to us — one made less daunting when we can trust in the immeasurable love of God, who is Mother and Father to us all.

Return with me, if you will, to Tamar's story. Tamar, the young royal princess, wears a distinctive robe, "**a sign of favor and special affection.**" She lives in a world where her powerful father and brothers hold sway over her but have responsibility to protect her. Tamar has abundant privilege, yet little power.

Tamar is obedient, trusting, and kind. When her father instructs her to help her ailing half-brother, Amnon, she goes and cooks for him. When Amnon bids her to bring food to his room, dutifully she goes, unaware that he has schemed and lied in order to get her alone, because he is obsessed with desire for her (2 Samuel 13:7-11).

When Amnon seizes and crudely propositions Tamar, she responds with an emphatic triple "No":



*No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile! – 2 Samuel 13:11-12.* She wisely anticipates the harm his crime would cause: “As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the scoundrels in Israel” (2 Samuel 13:13a).

But Amnon, the crown prince, ignores Tamar’s pleas and overpowers her, hurting and humiliating the one he was charged to protect. After raping Tamar, he has her thrown into the street (2 Samuel 13:14-18). Beware the suspicious claim that Amnon **loves Tamar**. His selfish and cruel behavior is the very antithesis of love (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Violent abuse can never trace its origins to love. Instead, violence expresses lust for power and control — an unjustifiable desire to dominate another person made in the image of God.

When I witness what happened to the biblical Tamar and to Jessica Lenahan, my body aches with pity and grief. I moan prayers of lament that have no words. I struggle to wrap my heart around these stories. There is no forgetting the alarming reality of domestic violence, which has besieged so many women in the ancient world and in ours. The bell of consciousness cannot be unrung. One must move forward to confront this deeply uncomfortable truth.

Unlike harmful foreign cultural practices, we readily (and perhaps rightly) condemn, domestic violence is undeniably an American problem, too. If one out of four women in the U.S. is affected, how many in our local communities?

Tamar expresses her profound grief by tearing her robe, putting ashes on her head, and wailing aloud. Her brother Absalom realizes what’s happened. She feels the momentary relief of sharing the burdensome truth — before he tells her to “be quiet for now” (2 Samuel 13:19-20).

Tamar's father becomes "very angry" (2 Samuel 13:21) but refuses to punish his beloved son Amnon. **One scholar** reflects on King David's incomprehensible passivity:

*Certainly, the David who dispatched Goliath, slew his tens of thousands, took the foreskins of two hundred Philistines, conquered the Ammonites... would muster some pointed response to an act of brutality within his own household. But it was not to be... From David we hear no word of compassion for his devastated daughter. Tamar remains desolate. She does not see truth brought to light or her abuser called to account.*

Jessica Lenahan also found justice elusive after the highest court in our land denied her a remedy. Then she pursued her case before an international human rights body, which found that the **U.S. had failed to act with due diligence** to protect Jessica and her daughters, thereby violating their human rights. At last, authorities acknowledged the injustice she'd suffered and implored our government to do more about domestic violence.

Mournfully, there was no justice in this life for Tamar. The unresolved pathos of her story transcends millennia to startle us awake. If we long for a cathartic ending, we have abundant opportunities to begin writing one in our own churches and communities. The work of justice and healing begs to be embraced.

Pastor J. Alfred Smith, Sr., frames the **call to action** poignantly:

*Who will pray with Tamar and stand by her side as she screams for justice? Do you remember that Tamar is your daughter, your granddaughter, your sister, your niece, blood of your blood and bone of your bone?*

Tamar's story is rightly sacred. It speaks a truth we are reluctant to hear. May our response to it, and to every Tamar we meet, be holy and just.

### **SPEAK! What Judges 19 Has to Say About Domestic Violence**

*“Look! My daughter the virgin and his wife-of-lesser-status – let me bring them out. Violate them and do to them whatever is good in your eyes; but against this man do not do such a disgraceful thing.” But the men would not listen to him. So, the man seized his wife-of-lesser-status and forced her out to them. They raped her and abused her internally all through the night until the morning. Then as the dawn began to break they sent her back. As morning appeared the woman came, and she fell down at the door of the man's house where her lord was, until it was light. In the morning her lord got up, opened the doors of the house, and when he went out to go on his way, there was the woman, his wife-of-lesser-status lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold! He said to her, “Get up! Let us go.” But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey and the man set out for his home. When he had entered his house, he took a knife and seized his wife-of-lesser-status; he butchered her to her bones into twelve pieces and sent her throughout the whole territory of Israel. ... Set your hearts on her, confer and speak! —Judges 19:24-30 (Hebrew translation by Rev. Dr. Wil Gafney)*

Judges 19 contains the most brutal story in all of the scriptures. While ostensibly advocating for an Israelite monarchy but simultaneously demonizing the Gibeonites of Benjamin, Saul's city and tribe, it is also the account of a gruesome rape-murder-dismemberment (or perhaps even a rape-dismemberment-murder) of a woman, facilitated in part by her own husband. It is a fitting text to engage in **October for Domestic Violence Awareness Month**, reflecting on domestic and intimate partner violence. Judges 19 is a story of intimate betrayal and the complicity of a larger community calling us to consider our own roles in our communities.

An oft-overlooked component of domestic violence is economic violence, or the intentional withholding of and access to financial resources from a target, making her or him dependent on the abuser. The narrative begins with an indicator of economic disparity: The woman is a wife of secondary status meaning she and any children would not be entitled to

support from her husband, making her financially vulnerable. It is possible he entered into a secondary union with her because she was not a Levite woman, reserving the prerogative of primary marriage for a tribeswoman. She is often mistranslated as a “concubine,” an inappropriate translation because a secondary or low-status wife had full societal recognition and legal status as would her children. Further, the Levite is described as the woman’s husband (19:3) and her father as his father-in-law (19:5).

The first action of the woman in the narrative is to leave her husband (19:2). We do not know why. Given the husband’s later conduct, it is not a stretch to imagine there was already violence between them. Domestic violence often includes an escalating pattern of verbal and other abuse and controlling, isolating behaviors.

The voice of the narrator, which is not the woman’s voice and does not have her interest at heart, presents her leaving as an act of sexualized betrayal. The verb at stake means “to be angry,” or even “hate,” but is a homonym of “sexual betrayal” and “selling sex.” The ambiguity is likely intentional, making it possible for some readers to blame her for leaving her husband and therefore whatever befalls her. It is not a claim that she was having an affair, for she went home to her father. Rather it’s the original form of slut-shaming: “Bad” women are sluts whether they’re having culturally inappropriate sex or not. It is the first act of violence against her.

Slut-shaming and name-calling is verbal violence and often accompanies physical violence. The idea that a person exercising agency and leaving a marriage or intimate partnership entitles the one left behind to respond with violence is a notion that preachers and interpreters of the scriptures must reject forcefully and publicly, particularly from the pulpit. The narrator represents the community and the judgment many fear and face when they make the difficult

decision to leave. We have the right and responsibility to respond differently and support our congregation and community members in what they decide is best for them.

The woman's return to her father's home belies the assumptions about patriarchy that many bring to the text. Her status as a secondary wife does not mean that she lacks power or agency. That her husband feels the need to woo her also illustrates this (19:3). Wooing is a common element of the cycle of abuse, woven between episodes of violence. She makes the decision to admit him to her father's house. Her father welcomed him and kept them from leaving for five days. Was this what we might call an intervention? Was her father aware of the reason for their separation and trying to keep her from going back? This portion of the story is a reminder how important it is for persons who decide to leave a marriage or partnership to have family, community, and resources to support them. Too many cannot go back home and have nowhere else to go and are all the more vulnerable to their abusers.

While we do not know there was abuse in their marriage prior to the assault, we do know that the decision to leave an intimate partner escalates the risk of violence—and for women who are being abused, significantly increases the likelihood of her death at his hands, with the danger ratcheting up for pregnant women. The couple leaves the safety of her father's home but never make it to their destination.

Six miles north, just outside Jebus (Jerusalem), they find that they must stop for the night. But the man refuses to stop in a foreign city, so they press on to Gibeah (19:11-12). With apparently no room in the local inns, they prepare to sleep outdoors in the town square when a fellow Ephraimite takes them in (the Levite had been living in Ephraim). He speaks peace to the man, but not to the woman (19:16-21). Soon after they arrive at the Gibeonite home, local men

show up and demand sexual access to the man (19:22). The proposed gang-rape is shocking and unanticipated, as is the householder's response. The man offers his innocent daughter and the Levite's wife whom the mob refuses (19:23).

**Judges 19 contains the most brutal story in all of the scriptures.**

There is an unfounded tradition in biblical scholarship to treat the offering of the virgin girl here (and in Gen 19) as hospitality to the extreme, but there is no evidence to support the notion that proffering one's daughter for sexual abuse would be an acceptable choice for a host even in extremis. Lot and this man are cultural outliers, not indicative of normative Israelite ethics. In this case, violation of a guest's wife would be a violation of the guest.

More important, the denial of the primary component of hospitality—physical safety—to this woman is emblematic of the disdain for women's lives shown by many abusers, reinforced by lethal sexism and misogyny in this text which pervades our culture and cultures around the world. The Levite forcibly puts his wife out, so the mob can rape and torture her (19:25b). This is an act of domestic violence and the most extreme form of intimate partner abuse. Their host is also complicit. The husband's actions negate his earlier tender speech to her, calling into question whether he was honestly wooing her to reconcile or to get her back to inflict harm on her.

In Hebrew, the rape itself is described in language indicating repeated ruthless scraping (as in gleaned a field) from within her body. Yet she is silent or silenced. She does not scream, cry, weep, beg, sob, moan, or shout "No!" She does not kick, bite, punch, scratch, wiggle, or whimper in the text. Perhaps those who heard her fighting and dying could not find the words to

describe the sounds she made. Perhaps she was silent, unable to scream, move, or fight. There is no right or wrong way to endure or survive a physical or sexual assault. Unfortunately, too many in law enforcement and beyond have truncated notions of what is acceptable “victim” behavior. There can be no judgment on a survivor’s choices.

The assault lasted all night long. Astonishingly she survived, somehow making her way back to the house and collapsing at the door (19:26). Her husband and host left her there until sunrise but did not check on her when the rapists left. They left her outside to die of her injuries. But it is not certain that she died of them. As she lay dead or dying, the language shifts to indicate she is property; the text calling the Levite “lord,” not “husband” (19:27). The failure to recognize the full humanity, dignity, and divine image of women and other targets of domestic and intimate partner violence is enduring and pervasive. In some cases, religious communities compound the problem with theology and text interpretation rooted in the Iron Age, subjugating women to the wills and whims of men.

Her lord-husband orders her to get up (19:28). When she does not move, only then does he touch her—without tenderness, care, or concern. There is no visible sign of grief. He puts her on a donkey and takes her home. There he dismembers her and sends a piece of her to each tribe to demonstrate the depravity of the Gibeonites, while demonstrating his own immorality in the process (19:29). The text does not say whether she died of her injuries, or dies on the way home, or is killed when her husband cuts into her flesh, dismembering her. It is all too horrible. The violence to her body is further violence to her and those who love her.

The sheer horror of what this woman endured—including at the hands of husband and host—extinguishes the fires of my sanctified imagination. I can only conjure her screams. And I have no words to express them.

One might look to God for a final word, but God is absent from the chapter, as this chapter and any mention of domestic violence is absent from too many pulpits. The final verse (19:30) is a command to those who will hear and read her story: *Set yourselves (your hearts) on her, confer and speak!* It is far past time for congregations and communities to seriously engage violence against women, domestic and intimate partner violence, and the survivors and abusers in our midst—in our scriptures, congregations, and communities. *Speak!*



## APPENDIX F

### SIX LITANIES FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

#### LITANY OF HOPE

*Retrieved from: <http://covchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/43/2014/06/AVA-DV-Sunday-Liturgies-Prayers-and-Readings.pdf>*

ONE: As we rejoice in hope

Let us remember our salvation:

The rivers of our tears

Will become a well of living water.

The seed which falls into the ground

Will rise and bear much fruit.

**ALL: Alleluia!**

ONE: The crushed and the bowed down

Will be lifted up in God's embrace

The dead trees of our parched life

Will spring forth again in healing leaves.

**ALL: Alleluia!**

ONE: Our turmoil and commotion

Will be held in the hollow of God's hand,

And our journey in the darkness

Will be led by the flame of God's love.

**ALL: Alleluia!**

ONE: We are not alone.

We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.

**ALL: Amen! Amen!**

### **LITANY OF ENCOURAGEMENT**

**RESPONSE: We lift them up to you, O God.**

**LEADER:** Let us pray for sisters and brothers who are discounted, defamed, and ridiculed. . .

Our sisters and brothers whose gifts are denied

Our sisters and brothers who are experiencing the pain of family and societal violence

Our sisters and brothers who are economically exploited.....

Our sisters and brothers whose color, language, or other precious gifts make them targets of abuse and neglect.....

Our sisters and brothers who are not with us today.....

Sisters and brothers, we acknowledge that violence exists in families in our land, and we commit ourselves to exposing that violence and to freeing those who suffer such violence from its crippling effects. Therefore, let us pray. For children who suffer pain, degradation, and rejection from those responsible for their care.

**ALL: Grant them safety and protection, O God.**

**LEADER:** For parents who suffer the anguish of their failures as parents,

**ALL: Grant them insight and healing, O God.**

**LEADER:** For women and men who are abused and battered by those who profess to love them,

**ALL: Grant them strength and courage, O God.**

**LEADER:** For women and men who batter those they love,

**ALL: Grant them the repentance which can change their lives, O God.**

**LEADER:** For all those who suffer violence in their families,

**ALL: Grant them love, solace and healing, O God.**

LEADER: For all Christians and people of good will,

**ALL: Grant them openness to and compassion for those who suffer family violence, O God.**

LEADER: God of Love and Creator of the Universe, restore all families to your loving care.

Teach them calm strength and patient wisdom that they may overcome arrogance and division as well as anger and violence, that they may resolve conflicts without violence, and nurture one another in the spirit of love and peace. Amen

### **LITANY OF UNITY**

**Reader One:** We gather together aware of the violence around us: the physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect of children, including abuse by religious leaders; the murder and beatings of women by their partners; the forced prostitution of young women in countries all over the world.

**Reader Two:** the sexual harassment of women in the workplace, including the church; the exploitation of women and children for profit and pornography; the rape of countless women within marriages and dating relationships;

**Reader Three:** The further violence perpetrated against women in the court system; ritual abuse and mutilation of women and children; the atrocities suffered by the victims of war; (The leader may invite others to name those for whom they wish to pray aloud or silently.)

**ONE:** In naming these forms of evil, we feel grief and pain.

**ALL:** Loving God, you are the one who desires that all people be brought into right relationship with one another and with you. Show us the path to justice and fill us with your healing power.

**ALL:** May we experience your presence among us as comforter, sustainer, and healer. –

**Litany for Gathering Around the Table: A Communion Liturgy**

*Worship resources Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence Network:  
<http://www.pcusa.org/phewa/padvn.htm> 8/26/2010, (accessed November 23, 2019)*

One: While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, “Take, this is my body.”

**All: As we eat this bread made of flour, we reflect that both this bread and some among us have been pounded by human hands.**

One: The flour is mixed with salt.

**All: We reflect that salt is painful to wounds. We pray that we would not reinjure our sisters and brothers by our words or actions.**

One: The salt and flour are mixed with oil.

**All: We reflect that oil is also used for healing and blessing. We pray for the healing of our sisters and brothers. We ask for God’s blessing upon them.**

One: God, we ask you to bless this broken bread and the broken bodies and spirits of our sisters and brothers. We ask that as we eat this bread you would continue the process of healing. Then Jesus took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them and all of them drank from it. He said to them, “This is the cup of salvation which is poured out for many.”

**All: As we drink from this cup, we reflect that both the wine and some among us have been crushed by human hands.**

One: Wine can be used to cleanse wounds.

**All: We ask God to cleanse us spiritually, emotionally, and physically.**

One: God, we ask you to bless this crushed juice and the crushed bodies and spirits of our sisters and brothers. We ask that as we drink from this cup you would begin new growth that will bear much fruit. The gifts of God for the people of God. Come, all is ready.

## **LITANY OF HEALING**

*Worship resources Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence Network:  
<http://www.pcusa.org/phewa/padvn.htm> 8/26/2010, (accessed November 23, 2019)*

ONE: God of grace, you nurture us with a love deeper than any we know, and your will for us is always healing and salvation.

**ALL: We praise you and thank you, O God.**

ONE: God of love, you enter our lives, our pain and our brokenness, and you stretch out your healing hands to us wherever we are.

**ALL: We praise you and thank you, O God.**

ONE: God of strength, you will us with your presence and send us forth with love and healing to all whom we meet.

**ALL: We praise you and thank you, O God.**

ONE: God of love, we ask you to hear the prayers of your people.

**ALL: Hear us, O God of life.**

ONE: Touch with your healing power the minds and hearts of all who suffer from sickness, injury, or disability, and make them whole again.

**ALL: Hear us, O God of life.**

ONE: Touch with your healing power the minds and hearts of all who live in confusion or doubt and fill them with your light.

**ALL: Hear us, O God of life.**

ONE: Touch with your healing power the minds and hearts of all who are burdened by anguish, despair, or isolation and set them free in love.

**ALL: Hear us, O God of life.**

ONE: Break the bonds of those who are imprisoned by fear, compulsion, secrecy, and silence.

**ALL: Come with your healing power, O God.**

ONE: Fill with peace those who grieve over separation and loss.

**ALL: Come with you healing power, O God.**

ONE: Restore to wholeness all those who have been broken in life or in spirit by violence within their families; restore to wholeness all those who have been broken in life or in spirit by violence within our Family of Nations; restore to them the power of your love; and give to them the strength of your presence.

**ALL: Come, O God, and restore us to wholeness and love.**

ONE: Let us now name before God those, including ourselves, for whom we seek healing: We lift up before you this day all those who have died of violence that they may have rest

**ALL: In that place where there is no pain or grief, but life eternal.**

ONE: O God, in you all is turned to light, and brokenness is healed. Look with compassion on us and on those for whom we pray, that we may be re-created in wholeness, in love and in compassion for one another.

**ALL: Amen.**

## “#METOO” LITANY

*As a way to lift our voices together in solidarity with women and girls who have said “me too.”*

LEADER: God of the matriarchs, we pray for all the women and girls who are survivors of sexual harassment and sexual assault. We bravely choose to share our stories in person and by posting #metoo on social media. We did nothing wrong, and we release all shame—shame that was never ours to begin with.

**ALL: God of love and mercy, hear our prayer.**

LEADER: God who knows our hearts, we pray for all women and girls who are survivors of sexual harassment and sexual assault. We bravely choose to keep our stories to ourselves for reasons of our own. And we walk alongside survivors whose suppressed memories have been triggered by #metoo posts. We did nothing wrong, and we own our stories.

**ALL: God of love and mercy, hear our prayer.**

LEADER: God of truth, as we remember our baptismal call as your precious and beloved children, we release any shame we were told is ours. In our own time and way, we release the people who didn't believe us or tried to minimize the truth. We did nothing wrong, and we own the truth.

**ALL: God of love and mercy, hear our prayer.**

LEADER: God of justice, we pray that those who harassed or assaulted us will come to understand the evil that they did, and that they will never do it again. And Lord God, our prayer calls us to action. We will use our voices. We will work to stop lawmakers and others from minimizing assault and blaming victims. We did nothing wrong, and we will work for change.

**ALL: God of love and mercy, hear our prayer.**

LEADER: God of courage, we give thanks for activists . . . We are thankful that their willingness to tell their story are leading other women to heal.

**ALL: God of love and mercy, hear our prayer.**

LEADER: God of wisdom, help us spread knowledge about what it means to live in a rape culture. Help us to stand firm in our faith and embolden us to work to end sexual violence and intimidation whenever it occurs in our church, community and world.

**ALL: God of love and mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.**



## APPENDIX G

### POST-SURVEY FOR FUTURE USE

#### **Domestic Violence Post Survey Questionnaire**

This questionnaire is designed to explore the needs and knowledge base of clergy and church leaders concerning domestic violence within their Christian context and surrounding community. This includes the appropriate way to address the topic from a biblical perspective in pastoral counseling and member care. The information you provide will be helpful for developing training modules for preaching, teaching and pastoral care and counseling in support of victims dealing with domestic violence.

This survey is being conducted by Sandra K. James, Doctor of Ministry candidate, Gordon Cornwell Theology Seminary. Please be assured that your responses will be kept strictly confidential. The information you provide will be presented only in summary form, in combination with responses from other participants of this survey. Your responses will never be linked with your name. **By completing this questionnaire, you have given your consent that you are a voluntary participant in this survey.**

**PROCEDURES:** If you agree to participate, your involvement will last for 7-10 minutes to complete a short survey. If any follow up is necessary, it will be schedule at a time most convenient for you not to exceed 30 minutes.



**RISKS:** There are no known risk associated with this research project. Although there may be some possible discomfort in providing honest answers. Should you need to speak to someone concerning any emotional or spiritual discomfort or triggers as a result of completing this survey please call the Center for Pastoral Care and Counseling at (703) 903-9696 to speak to a counselor.

**BENEFITS:** The potential personal benefits that may occur as a result of your participation in this study are you will have the opportunity to share your perspective and knowledge and contribute in the training of other clergy and church leadership concerning domestic violence.

**COMPENSATION:** You **will not** be compensated for participating in this research project.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. To ensure confidentiality no identifying personal information will be used, printed information will be stored in a secure file cabinet and electronic information will be password protected. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:** Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating

at any time. If you decide not to take part, or if you stop participating at any time, your decision will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. Any data collected from the participant prior to withdrawal from the study will be included if relevant to the study or destroyed).

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Sandra K. James, (703) 969-1887, or email, sanjam40@hotmail.com. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Co-Chair of the Institutional Review Board, Dr. David A. Currie, or email, dcurrie@gordonconwell.edu or 978-646-417.

*Please complete and submit this survey by future date to be determined.*

*Thank you,*

*Sandra K. James*

**Working Definition of Domestic Violence:** a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another. **Domestic violence** can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that exhibit control and influence over another person. **Spiritual abuse** is the misappropriation of scripture by clergy and church leaders thereby inflicting more harm on victims causing greater damage to those seeking spiritual guidance.

**Circle One:**

1. Gender: Male or Female.
2. Age in years: 24 and under; 24-34; 35-44; 45-54; 55-64; 65 and above.
3. Ministry Title: Senior Pastor; Clergy; Church Leader.
4. Education: Seminary Graduate, College Graduate, Other.

**Scale: 5-point Likert:** (5) Strongly Agree, (4) Agree, (3) Neutral, (2) Disagree, (1) Strongly Disagree

**Circle One**

5 4 3 2 1	1. My formal education adequately trained me to deal with issues concerning domestic violence.
5 4 3 2 1	2. I am comfortable in my abilities to adequately provide appropriate pastoral care and counseling when dealing with domestic violence issues in the church.

- |   |   |   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3. The Bible speaks to the issues of domestic violence.  |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 4. I have addressed the issue of domestic violence within my church.   |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 5. I am aware of at least one domestic violence situation presently ongoing within my church.  |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 6. In my tenure as pastor/clergy/leader, I have dealt with at least one or more issues of domestic violence.   |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 7. I am aware of the resources in my community that provide assistance to victims of domestic violence.  |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8. I am knowledgeable of the referral process for victims of domestic violence.  |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 9. The leadership and ministerial staff of my church have received training on how to appropriately handle domestic violence issues.   |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 10. Under my leadership this church has addressed domestic violence in some form (i.e. ministry awareness, educational awareness campaign, or financial support to community organizations). |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 11. It is my desire for anyone in the community who suffers from domestic violence, to feel comfort coming to the church (pastor and or staff) for assistance and support.                   |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 12. I know what resources are available within the community to provide training to my pastoral care staff with assisting, supporting and referring domestics violence victims.              |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 14. My church has adequate resources to assist in providing services to victims of domestic violence.  |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 15. My church needs more resources to assist victims of domestic violence.   |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 16. The demands for domestic violence services outweighs available resources in my community.  |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 17. I know where to refer a woman for help who is a victim of domestic violence.   |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 18. I know where to refer a man for help who is a victim of domestic violence.   |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 19. I know where to refer a child affected by domestic violence.   |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 20. I am comfortable teaching and preaching about domestic   |

violence and what the bible have to say concerning this issue.

- |           |  |   |
|-----------|--|---|
| 5 4 3 2 1 |  | 21. I need training on how to preach and teach on issues of domestic violence.    |
| 5 4 3 2 1 |  | 22. I need training in pastoral care and counseling concerning domestic violence. |
| 5 4 3 2 1 |  | 23. If offered I would attend domestic violence training.                         |

**You may add any additional comments here:**

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